ADOLESCENT READING IMPROVEMENT:

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES

by

Anne Summerall Poplin

Liberty University

A Proposal Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experience of improvement in reading comprehension of adolescent readers who have made gains greater than what might be predicted based on previous growth in reading comprehension measures. These research questions guided this study: What influences have impacted the lived experiences of these improving readers? What barriers to reading improvement existed for these students? In addition, what school-related reading experiences, if any, hold meaning for these readers? What characteristics are shared among adolescent readers who have experienced better-than-expected growth? Interviews, story chart artifacts created by participants, and observations of students' process and self-talk while reading short passages were collected from 12 students at Placid High School (pseudonym). Analysis was conducted using Hycner's framework and hermeneutic analysis in order to discover the essence of these students' experiences as improving readers. Methodologically, this study ascertained shared characteristics and experiences that influenced the reading comprehension growth of these adolescents through inductive study of all data. Four themes emerged through the data analysis: Reading as Provocation, Reading as Displacement, Reading as Relationship, and Reading as Confluence.

Keywords: adolescent literacy, adolescent readers, reading comprehension

Dedication

Soli deo Gloria.

In Memoriam

This dissertation is presented in memory of my mother, June Love Smith Summerall, a brilliant woman who loved fiercely and with a great burden for her grandchildren, children, and husband. Her long-hand journals, triplicate copies of manuscripts submitted (and rejected) for publication, scribbled lists, and underlined, annotated passages in theology and psychology books inspired me to read early and significantly above grade level. I was certain that answers were in those books, between those binder covers, on the backs of those envelopes. I devoured her words and the words that moved her in an often vain attempt to plumb the unfathomable depths and calculate the immeasurable heights of her interior life. Now, I think I understand. Her secrets are safe with me.

Acknowledgements

According to writer Anne Lamott, there are really only two prayers we ever need utter: "Thank you, thank you, thank you," and "Help me, help me, help me." God responded to both of those prayers through of the love, support, and occasional words of righteous admonishment of the many who guided, mentored, humored, and sometimes carried me on this journey.

First, I am deeply indebted to my family. For the love of learning modeled in a Christ-centered life – Dad, you brought the black-and-white squiggles on the printed page to life for me, and I learned to love the Word at your feet, sitting on a pile of theology books. For the devotion, respect, and encouragement of my husband, my partner, my best friend, and my kindest critic – David, may the rest of our Sunday afternoons, empty of deadlines, stretch before us. For the curiosity, for the concern, and for the conviction that I would finish of our two adult children – Grace and Mac, I hope you saw how God provides for us strength when we have no more of our own. It has been a long story of what can happen when you "take delight in the Lord," and wait for him to "give you the desires of [your] hearts."

I also wish to express my sincere appreciation to my Chair and my Committee Members: Dr. Grania Holman, for her vision of how academics, faith, family, and service can be woven together in the beautiful fabric of a woman's life; Dr. James Zabloski, for his unflinching expectations of excellence and his willingness to share his own growth story with students at Liberty University; and Dr. Joseph Powell, for his enthusiastic encouragement and professional collegiality through the years before, during, and, I trust, after this project.

In addition, I would like to thank my colleagues, past and present, at South Aiken High School. They believed in me, even when I no longer believed in myself.

Last, my heartfelt gratitude to all the students who shared their reading lives with me as participants. I pray that I did justice to the books, the people, and the stories that you all entrusted to me. You and students like you give purpose and hope to all educational researchers.

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List of Abbreviations

-- (ACT) no longer an acronym but a trademark name of a college-readiness test

Accelerated Reader (AR)

Advanced Placement (AP)

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS)

College Preparatory track (CP)

GORT 4 (Gray Oral Reading Test)

High School Assessment Program (HSAP)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Measures of Academic Progress (MAP)

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA)

-- (PLAN) no longer an acronym but a trademarked test of career-and-college readiness

Preliminary SAT (PSAT)

-- (RAND) not an abbreviation but an independent nonprofit organization's utilization of a contraction of terms *research and development*

-- (SAT) no longer an acronym but a trademarked name of a college-entrance examination

Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Surfing the Internet, SnapChatting, reading storylines in adventure video games, texting, Facebooking, Tweeting – it would be easy to argue that adolescents today have more fully integrated reading and writing into their lives than any previous generation. However, the multiple literacy perspective that honors the fact that the social lives of high school students are in their own voices minimizes the implications of the superficial nature of these communications.

In reality, for decades adolescents have not been reading well enough to function effectively with on grade-level texts, a situation documented in the Nation's Report card in 2005, when "only 35% of twelfth graders in the U.S. tested at the proficient reading level" (Coombs, 2012, p. 83), and confirmed in Biancarosa and Snow's (2006) seminal call-to-action regarding secondary students' reading struggles. Since then, standardized test score trends have continued to verify a significant decline in reading performance. While total group mean SAT mathematics scores have increased steadily since the College Board began keeping data in 1972, increasing from 509 to 514 in 2013, critical reading scores have declined from a high in 1972 of 530 to an historic low of 496 in 2012 and 2013 (College Board, 2013). While it is true that more students from increasingly diverse backgrounds and curricula are taking the SAT, those same students are taking both the math and reading subsections, suggesting that the falling scores in reading comprehension are a phenomenon worth investigating.

This same trend is reflected in the 2013 Nation's Report card of 12th graders' performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP): while mathematics scores have increased, there has been a statistically significant drop in average reading scores since 1992 and no change at all from 2009 to 2013 (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). These

data suggest that a problem exists at the secondary level, one that needs the attention of both practitioners and researchers.

Background

Historically, reading instruction has been implemented only at the elementary school level, and the assumption has been that regular education students reach proficiency well before high school. The professional preparation for most high school teachers, even language arts teachers, has included a single course in reading theory at best. Today many districts and schools are attempting to address the problem of reading comprehension through reading intervention initiatives at the high school level, such as South Carolina's Read to Succeed initiative signed into law in 2014, though little is known about how to help secondary students improve as readers. Unfortunately, these well-intentioned efforts are often too little, too late, since student reading gains typically slow in high school (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Graham & Herbert, 2011).

At the same time, the rigor both of texts that students are asked to comprehend and of the tasks that they are asked to complete is increasing (Edmonds et al., 2009). To clarify, the Common Core State Standards, which is impacting instruction in American high schools, has outlined a more challenging level of complexity as measured by Lexile levels, effectively moving the difficulty level of texts one or more grade levels earlier. For example, a text previously ranked as an appropriate challenge (in terms of quantitative measures of vocabulary and sentence length) for a ninth-grade independent reading at a 960 Lexile level has now been moved to the level recommended for fourth or fifth grade (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010). Common Core State Standards grade-level exemplar texts include by authors such as Eliot and Jarrett in second and third grades, Twain and Churchill in

sixth and eighth grades, Kafka and Euclid in ninth and tenth grades, and Chesterton and Ortiz Cofer in eleventh and twelfth grades. To offer an elucidating – and perhaps overly simplified – reference point, the Lexile level of the children's classics *Wind in the Willows* and *Swiss Family Robinson* are computed at 940 (upper fifth grade) and 1190 (mid ninth-tenth grade) respectively, and often-taught teen novels *Twilight* and *The Hunger Games* weigh in at 720 and 810 (lower fourth grade) (MetaMetrics, 2014).

Setting aside arguments about the canon and reader-text "fit," adolescents lose when their tastes win: a 2010 study of what is actually taught in literature studies in ninth through eleventh grades found that "the mean readability levels of assigned titles by grade are between fifth and sixth grade" ("Did You Know?," 2011). This trend has continued and is correlated with stagnant reading scores and a widening achievement gap in reading comprehension nationally. Susan Pimentel, who serves on the National Assessment Governing Board of the NAEP, said in response to The Nation's Report Card of 2013, "A very worrisome trend is providing students with a steady dose of low-level texts and not nearly enough reading and talking about texts" (Paulson, 2014). For this, and for many other reasons, students are experiencing very little discomfort in their academic environments. They have found that they are quite able to keep up with their coursework, not only in their literature classes but in science and history as well, without reading at all, much less at an appropriate level of text complexity.

Yet the situation for their teachers has become complicated. The expectation is that classroom instruction will reach the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy but students do not (or cannot or will not) read the assigned texts. How can students analyze the rhetorical strategies in Dr. King's "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" if they can't comprehend it? Or how can they evaluate a current U.S. Supreme Court decision if they haven't read the Constitution?

Therefore, teachers have been implementing more compensatory strategies (Ness, 2008) which enable their students to actively participate in analysis, evaluation, and even synthesis levels of thinking without having read independently. To accomplish this, teachers across the content areas present content using multiple modalities such as videos, graphics, and narrative retellings to give the students the content for the higher-order exercises, instead of building on students' independently gained knowledge through robust reading experiences (which surely is the intent of any taxonomy-based lesson). Yet when reading is removed from text-based learning, what remains is a series of disconnected activities that reveals "the fragmentation and systematic degradation of public high school literature curricula" (Rothman, 2011, p. 1218).

At the same time, the philosophical underpinnings of current educational practice and cultural trends are impeding accurate and insightful reading (Prose, 2007), including the ironic impact of integrating critical theories and asserting the dominance of postmodernism on textual authority. Postmodernism as a self-refuting philosophy has been effectively challenged and rejected by many contemporary thinkers (Pearcey, 2004; Prose, 2007; van Brummelen, 2002), but its shadowy legacy, when allowed to hover over classrooms, is often despair. Teachers and student sense that they are on a battlefield of "warring camps of deconstructionists, Marxists, feminists, and so forth, all battling for the right to tell students that they were reading 'texts' in which ideas and politics trumped what the writer had actually written" (Prose, 2007, p. 8). Removing the text from the center of attention and instead inserting the "self" or "theory" focuses students as readers on "an array of secondary considerations (identity studies, abstruse theory, sexuality, film and popular culture)" and "in doing so, [the developers of curriculum] have distanced themselves from the young people interested in good books" (Rothman, 2011, p. 121). While students may choose books of less complexity, research suggests that they are

interested in rich texts when teachers facilitate their accessing the meaning. In a study of a close reading protocol, a high school student said, "We're reading stuff that is way hard, but way interesting when you finally get it" (Fisher & Frey, 2013, p. 36).

Another factor in the challenge of reading improvement at the secondary level is that the impact of reading interventions for struggling readers diminishes as they move through high school, a phenomenon seen in significantly smaller effect sizes across researched interventions on some of the most effective interventions that link writing with reading (Graham & Herbert, 2011). Additionally, the impact of No Child Left Behind legislation on student achievement is proving to be negative for students who were performing on or close to grade level. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and the Southern Regional Education Board (2010) suggested that achievement levels across the high school curriculum have been set lower, testing reading and math skills at an eighth- to tenth-grade level, "due to pressures on states and schools to minimize the numbers of students who do not receive a diploma" (p. 3). This policy brief continues:

> No Child Left Behind has reinforced this tendency, as the law holds states accountable for high school graduation rates irrespective of proficiency levels represented by the diploma. Despite competing pressures to ensure that all high school graduates are college ready, states have found it politically difficult to set high school exit exams at higher levels. It is no surprise, then, that many students who earn a high school diploma and pass the exit exams are far from being college ready. (The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and the Southern Regional Education Board, 2010, p. 3)

While policy-makers remain involved in political conversations, educators are compelled to respond to the situation, and there are some students who can show the way. Most reading

research focuses on special-needs students, second-language learners, and "struggling readers," and rightfully so, but apt attention is not given to the needs of all of our students when we focus solely on disempowered or marginalized populations, or those who struggle to approach grade-level comprehension. Some high school students do, against the odds, make progress as readers. They are not always the "struggling readers" into whom schools rightfully and generously pour resources; sometimes readers seem to blossom in high school as they are nourished by an intentional move away from a "deficit" frame of thinking about our students and move toward a "dynamic" perspective that honors the strengths they bring (Ford & Graham, 2003).

In addition to needing to read well for information, understanding, or academic advancement, research also suggests that reading assists students in fulfilling other important purposes. Indeed, reading is a powerful tool in shaping positive self-identities (Coombs, 2012), which is their Eriksonian developmental task during these years, and the power of reading, in turn, shapes the positive self-identities (Coombs, 2012) that students do bring to the task of reading. "Adolescent literacy education is the very forum where we shape identities and citizens, cultures and communities" and "is not something we can do by default or as an afterthought" (Elkins & Luke, 1999, p. 215). Perhaps even more importantly, reading challenging and rich literature does more than develop the self – it connects individuals to each other through time and across spaces. Roger Shattuck asserted the following in his 1994 speech "Nineteen Theses on Literature":

> Works of literature, through their amalgam of representation and imagination, of clarity and mystery, of the particular and the general, offer revealing evidence about material nature and human nature and whatever may lie beyond. This is why we read and study and discuss literary works. (as cited in Rothman, 2011, p. 117)

Challenging works shape readers individually and connect corporately – but only if readers can *read* them. All students benefit from participating in this exciting work, and there are some who grow enough to do so. By listening to these readers who have made better-than-expected gains to become effective readers, teachers of English language arts will begin to reframe a vision of the goal at which they aim in literacy instruction, and therefore can better orient more students in that direction. The purpose is not to establish a model of instruction (education will be and always has been resistant to codification because it is inherently organic and dynamic) but simply to confirm, describe, and better understand the experience of readers' growing into excellence. This is important to study because researchers usually focus on struggling readers who are significantly behind their age-peers or who are special education students (Edmonds et al., 2009), but they rarely study successful readers, much less readers who have overcome obstacles to move from struggling to soaring (Coombs, 2012) to see what they have in common.

Situation to Self

My motivation for conducting this study is grounded in my experiences both as a reader and as a teacher of readers. I was an early reader who later encountered reading problems, and I have many specific memories of reading instruction as well as barriers that impeded my own growth. It is interesting that from my current vantage point, I see that those struggles had little to do with my reading and everything to do with our stressful family situation. However, the pedagogy and compassion from my teachers and from my father helped me overcome the two concurrently. Ultimately, though, what I really learned is that the world that I read is a place that makes sense, contrary to what I might have experienced day to day.

This is a truth that I long for my students to experience. In general, a paradox of paradigms drives my practice and my person. I persist in a positivist perspective while working in a constructivist, postmodern academic atmosphere: I see the text and the author as authoritative, a view that is neither popular nor widely accepted. Part of my conviction comes from my Christian perspective that there is a truth to be known, and the rest from understanding the impact of existentialism on literature and adolescent thinking. However, it is surely true that each reader does indeed construct meaning individually from a text, so our job as educators is to ensure that each student is equipped to do so.

In terms of my philosophical assumptions, I am cognizant of the importance of the separation of church and state, and I lean on the laws of our land to protect my children from being proselytized by my Wiccan, atheist, and humanist colleagues. Yet I pray that my life and the lessons I design stand in stark contrast to the darkness the world offers these young people. Axiologically, I embrace the importance of the value of virtue and the role of both ethics and aesthetics (Knight, 2006) in developing students in a public school setting through the reading curriculum. Epistemologically, I acknowledge that by gathering information from a variety of sources, a clearer understanding, ever approaching truth, can be attained. Metaphysically, I design reading experiences to allow students to determine patterns of history, extrapolate qualities of human nature, and confront the reality of human brokenness. Close and accurate reading of any piece of literature directly reveals the need for an education that "[restores] the image of God in our students" (Knight, 2006, p. 231), "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Teleologically, I assert that the story in which we find ourselves a beginning, a middle, and an end that can be read and understood, a story written by the finger of

God on everyone's heart, a story full of purpose, a story hurtling toward the second coming of Christ.

Problem Statement

Briefly, the problem is that too few students make steady gains in reading comprehension while in high school, and research confirms that educators know little about how to help them. While *Reading Next* (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006), the influential report on adolescent literacy to the Carnegie Institute, asserted that teachers of older students have many effective interventions to choose among, Edmonds et al. (2009) countered that "many secondary students continue to demonstrate difficulties with reading" (p. 262) which is "widening the gap between their achievement and that of their grade-level peers" (p. 262) due to the dearth of actual reading instruction for high school students, among many other confounding factors.

Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress confirms that this trend continues as the reading performance of high school seniors continues to decline. The percentage of students at or above "proficient" is lower, at a level of statistical significance, today than in 1992 (Easton, 2014). More specifically, 40% of high school seniors scored at or above "proficient" in 1992 on the NAEP reading assessment and 38% in 2013, a statistically significant difference ($p < .05$), with average scores declining from 292 in 1992 to 288 in 2013 (302 is considered "proficient") (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Yet research continues to suggest that what teachers do, matters:

The NAEP assessment asked students how frequently they discussed interpretations of what they read in class. Students who reported they did so every day or almost every day had higher scores than those who reported they did so less frequently. (Easton, 2014, p. 1)

Perhaps, then, it is within the power and influence of teachers to impact their students' reading comprehension abilities.

There are significant and often cited gaps in the literature of adolescent literacy, specifically with regard to reading comprehension. First, researchers are just beginning to focus on this age group in general reading research (Goering & Baker, 2010; Wexler, Vaughn, & Roberts, 2010); there are many substantial studies on middle-grade reading comprehension improvement, "but studies with older adolescents who struggle as readers, such as those in high school and college, are significantly absent" (Coombs, 2012, p. 85). Where the research does exist, however, the focus has been solely on adolescent readers who are considered struggling readers, and Coombs (2012), in addition to others, noted that it is important to move the focus from struggling to successful readers. At least one research team examining ineffective strategies that should theoretically increase comprehension for struggling students suggested further research with the same metacognitive strategies with students who are reading on grade level with grade-level texts (McCallum et al., 2011), perhaps in hopes that what doesn't assist one group will help another. Also, Traxler and Tooley (2008) suggested that while they successfully defined "autonomous meaning-makers" as readers who read complex texts accurately and effectively without scaffolding, that the actual processes that these successful readers utilize needs examination and exploration (Traxler & Tooley, 2008), even though the act and processes of reading comprehension are, by nature, unobservable (McCallum et al., 2011).

Purpose Statement

This study addressed these problems by exploring the lived experiences and reading processes of students who have made better-than-expected gains as readers while in high school. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore improvement in reading

comprehension of adolescent readers who have made gains while in high school. The goal of this study is to discover the essence of these reading improvement experiences so that teachers can nurture these readers and perhaps even begin to advocate for conditions in high schools conducive to reading improvement.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that it fills in some of the gaps that currently exist in educators' understanding of what helps students continue improving as readers. Specifically, this study presents the voices of students who have made better-than-expected gains in reading comprehension as they spoke to how they understand their improvement. In addition, hearing the experiences of these students will offer educators some clarity on what is working as they proceed with implementing reading interventions and move into standards-driven reading instruction across the content areas.

Research Questions

Through this study I sought to explore the ways that adolescent readers perceive the influences on their improvement as readers. In addition, I sought to understand the processes utilized by these improving readers when they approach challenging texts.

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What influences have impacted the lived experiences of these students as improving readers? Students in the study exhibited improvement as readers, but the *meaning* of that evidence that suggests improvement is what must be explored. As stated by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), "Student achievement on a test does not in and of itself tell the tester or the teacher much of anything until the narrative of the student's learning history is brought to bear

on the performance" (p. 31). Perhaps "an interpretive pathway between action [improvement] and meaning [lived experiences]" (p. 31) might be discovered by hearing these students' stories.

RQ2: What barriers to reading improvement existed for these students? The research is replete with studies that allow educators to understand barriers for struggling readers and to attempt to extrapolate barriers to improvement that other adolescents may experience (Chall, 1983; Fang, 2008; Gilliam, Dykes, Gerla, & Wright, 2011), but the barriers seem to be as numerous as the readers who fail to grow. Through answering interview questions and creating a coherent narrative of their changes as readers, participants were empowered to name their own barriers and therefore help educators better understand how to support the improvement of other readers with these shared characteristics.

RQ3: What high school-related reading experiences, if any, hold meaning for adolescent readers? Coombs (2012) suggested that literacy education would benefit from a deeper understanding of how, if at all, curriculum and classroom environment affect the reading stories of adolescents who are not labeled as "struggling," especially in discovering if successes early in their academic careers influenced the way they understand their own reading plateaus and growth. Additionally, much quantitative research investigates the efficacy of reading improvement interventions, but do these interventions create the sort of impact conducive to the "power of the moments that transpire in the classroom" (Coombs, 2012, p. 97) and leave lasting impact on adolescent readers? Perhaps these students can tell us.

RQ4: What characteristics are shared among adolescent readers who have experienced better-than-expected growth? Traxler and Tooley (2008) acknowledged that researchers and educators simply do not know much about the processes and traits of successful adolescent readers and suggested that this is an area worthy of investigation.

Through discovering answers to these questions, a portrait was synthesized, capturing the experiences of students who made better-than-expected reading comprehension improvement, as their stories were oriented in a past, a present, and future, both individual and collective.

Definitions

The phenomenon of interest in this study was the lived experiences of high school students who had made better-than-expected gains in reading comprehension. This required a shared understanding of several terms.

1. *Better-than-expected gains* – Better-than-expected gains were measured against typical growth, generally defined as a standard deviation increase, as established by Archer (2010). Application of this formula identified students who performed at or above grade level but whose improvement could not be explained by typical academic growth and cognitive development. Table 1 clarifies the concept and measures of better-than-expected or "ambitious growth" (Archer, 2010):

Table 1

Average Yearly Reading Growth as a Function of Starting Level (Non-Overlapping Ranges)

Lexile range	M	SD
100L to 299L	308	187
300L to 499L	236	145
500L to 599L	199	125
600L to 699L	166	114
700L to 799L	142	105
800L to 899L	120	102
900L to 999L	110	95
1000L to 1199L	81	82
1200L to 1500L	60	63

Note. Ambitious Growth in Lexile Points: Baseline + M + SD = Ambitious Growth

2. *Autonomous meaning-makers* – The effectiveness of the readers' processes defined the students in the study as "autonomous meaning-makers" (Traxler & Tooley, 2008), readers who can read increasingly difficult texts without scaffolding or other types of reading assistance, such as prompts, prior knowledge activation, or isolation of grammatical or syntactical cues. Reading was explored as essentially an act of reflective inquiry and critical thinking as established by Dewey (1910): "The essence of critical thinking is to suspend judgment; and the essence of this suspense is inquiry to determine the nature of the problem before proceeding to attempts at its solution" (68 of 208).

3. *Reading comprehension* – Reading comprehension refers to the students' ability to make meaning from a text independently from both literal and appropriate figurative referents. Apthorp and Clark (2007) cited the 2002 RAND Reading Study group to define reading comprehension as the following: understanding what is read, learning new concepts, getting deeply involved in reading, critically evaluating text, and applying new knowledge to solve intellectual and practical problems. Apthorp (2007) also suggested, based on the Reading Framework developed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress Reading Framework, that comprehension includes "forming a general understanding, developing interpretation, making reader/text connections, and examining content and structure" (vi). These definitions and characterizations match what is implied in the Common Core State Standards as well, but this document also asserted that other critical parts of reading comprehension are the student's ability to analyze of the craft of the writer, to build an accurate interpretation based on the textual evidence, to examine claims a writer makes, and to compare and contrast texts across disciplines (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010).

Summary

The issue of reading improvement during the high school years is urgent during an epoch marked by declining comprehension and increasing demands on adolescents. However, little is known about how to help secondary students make reading gains, and there are significant gaps in the research regarding adolescent literacy. The purpose of this study is to explore, through a phenomenological lens, the stories of readers who have made ambitious gains and to discover what is most essential in those readers' experiences. Four research questions drive this study: What influences have impacted the lived experiences of these students as improving readers? What barriers to reading improvement existed for these students? What high school-related reading experiences, if any, hold meaning for adolescent readers? and What characteristics are shared among adolescent readers who have experienced better-than-expected growth? Answers to these questions can inform pedagogy and theory in order to empower teachers and impact policy regarding curriculum decisions.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The contexts for understanding reading are complex and interwoven. The conceptual framework of this study is based on the work of Chall (1983) to delineate the development, predominantly cognitive, of readers as they enter adolescence and young adulthood in relation to the texts that they read. The theoretical framework is based on Brooks' literary theory of new criticism, Rosenblatt's transactional reader response theory, and Vygotsky's social constructivism. The review of literature is organized by reading processes, barriers to improvement, and types of interventions currently utilized in high school classrooms, and will conclude with a summary of the effectiveness of such interventions.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based on Chall's (1983) reading stage theory. Chall's scheme served as a lens for analyzing the shared characteristics of adolescent readers who made better-than-expected gains in reading comprehension as well as understanding some of the barriers to reading improvement that they self-reported. Chall directly credited Piaget's theory of cognitive development as a preeminent basis for her thinking (Chall, 1983). While Chall's early reading stages may help clarify less developed readers' characteristics, the focus in this study was the stages that middle school and high school students typically experience. Chall's scheme also informed this study's exploration into how, why, and under what conditions adolescents continue growing as readers in order to contextualize the reading experiences of the adolescent participants.

While most closely associated with reading instruction reform in the 1970s at the elementary level, Chall's (1983) work has remained influential, and her comprehensive vision

for reading development into adulthood continues to be informative as educators struggle with understanding the barriers and successes of adolescent students. For example, Goldman (2012) referenced Chall's reading stages as foundational to understanding the Common Core State Standards' expectation that adolescents read to learn with ever-increasing sophistication. Chall's reading stage model is not a theory, she strongly asserted, but is instead a "scheme for arranging and interpreting facts from basic and applied research and the wisdom gained from experience in the classroom and the clinic" (Chall, 1983, p.10) to inform our understanding of how readers grow and change as they move from pre-reading to the construction and reconstruction of a printed text.

Chall's (1983) scheme includes six stages which delineate successive changes in the ways in which readers interact with the text in a manner more qualitative than quantitative. Movement through the stages is marked by "growth in the ability to read language that is more complex, less frequently encountered, more technical, and more abstract" (Chall, 1983, p. 12); the ability to engage ever-widening and deepening prior knowledge; and increased flexibility in responses to texts. Progress is hierarchal as each stage builds upon previous stages, and earlier stages can serve as a coping mechanism when readers confront texts, contexts, or purposes beyond their current level of development. The first four stages span from birth to the end of middle school, and the last two stages from early high school to college and beyond. For the purposes of this study, primary interest will lie in Stage 3B (late middle school) to Stage 5 (young adulthood). However, the earlier stages may be informative in understanding the growth of participants, even those reading quantitatively on grade level.

Learning-to-Read Stages

In Chall's (1983) scheme, reading development begins at birth with immersion in a "literate culture" (Chall, 1983, p. 15) at Stage 0 (Birth to age 6), or "Pre-Reading" (Chall, 1983, p. 13), with the increasing awareness of and control over the sounds and sights of language, especially words and syntax, which then overlaps early in a child's schooling with Stage 1, or "Initial Reading" (Chall, 1983, p. 15), when children begin to associate sounds with letter combinations and to decode. Additionally, at this stage readers acquire an understanding of the systematic nature of the alphabetic language. Chall suggested that it is important for children to move beyond anticipating the meaning of the text and to firmly adhere to decoding, even when they make mistakes in sound associations as they move through this period of "cautiousness" (Chall, 1983, p. 46).

Stage 2 (ages 6 to 9), known as "Confirmation, Fluency, Ungluing from Print" (Chall, 1983, p. 18) spans second and third grades and is the time in which reading is an act of corroborating what the readers already know as they rehearse and re-read familiar stories. Repetition of story lines and of story structures with familiar subjects and themes in print texts is a critical element of reading to gain fluency. Readers move from predominately oral reading to the beginnings of silent reading as word recognition becomes more automatic during this time that Chall characterized as requiring a "more courageous, even daring attitude" (Chall, 1983, p. 47).

Reading-to-Learn Stages: Middle School

Stage 3 (ages 9 to 14), the minimum functional reading level in an industrial society (Chall, 1983), is marked by the transition from learning to read to reading to learn, and readers now need "materials and purposes that are clear, within one viewpoint, and limited in technical

complexities" (Chall, 1983, p. 20). So many students, however, encounter roadblocks at this leg of their reading journey that Chall coined the phrase "fourth-grade slump" (Chall, 1983, p. 68) to capture the pervasiveness of the problem. The need for prior knowledge and an effective reading process begins to assert itself as children confront these new kinds of texts with the new purpose of "the mastering of ideas" (Chall, 1983, p. 22) with reflectiveness and the interest in collecting facts fueled by the latency period. Children exchange watching and listening as primary modes of gaining new information with reading, which by the end of this stage, most children find more efficient, especially silent reading. It is worth noting, however, that Chall suggested that a slower reading pace and oral reading improve comprehension and engagement with texts that are experienced mostly for "esthetic and affective purposes" such as "poetry, Shakespeare, the Bible, Dickens" (Chall, 1983, p. 36) throughout reading development.

Stage 3A (ages 9 to 11) is differentiated from Stage 3B (ages 12 to 14) by a movement away from reading for "egocentric purposes, to reading about conventional knowledge of the world" (Chall, 1983, p. 22). It is at this point in Chall's scheme that it becomes helpful for clarifying the concept of expected growth for adolescent readers from a more qualitative perspective, since many first-year high school students begin their secondary careers on level in Stage 3B. Most significantly, this stage represents a subtle shift in the dynamic changes occurring in readers it is now that they become more able to "analyze what they read and to react critically to the different viewpoints they meet" (Chall, 1983, p. 22) and to read on a more general adult level.

Reading-to-Learn Stages: High School and Beyond

However, it is Stage 4, or "Multiple Viewpoints" (Chall, 1983, p. 23) that Chall suggested as an accurate descriptor of the reading activities of on-level high school students and

as the minimum level in a knowledge society, as opposed to an industrial society (Chall, 1983).

At this point, "reading may essentially involve an ability to deal with layers of facts and concepts

added on to those acquired earlier" (Chall, 1983, p. 23). This stage is reached through reading of

textbooks in the sciences and humanities, "more mature fiction" (Chall, 1983, p. 23), and

continued independent reading in both longer and shorter, more ephemeral forms ranging from

books to journals and newspapers to encounter increasingly challenging concepts and points of

view (Chall, 1983). It is during this stage that readers search for relationships among ideas, often

experimenting with skepticism while certainty gives way to ambiguity as they report the

differences among and between ideas (Chall, 1983).

     Building on Perry's work in the seminal study of the intellectual development of college

students (Perry, 1970), Chall's (1983) scheme also includes room for developmental and reading

growth beyond what the typical reader may attain by the end of high school, since the transition

to the final stage "seems to depend on the reader's cognitive abilities, accumulated knowledge,

and motivation" (Chall, 1983, p. 51). The challenge of Stage 5, or "Construction and

Reconstruction: A World View" (Chall, 1983, p. 23) (ages 18 and beyond), is powerfully stated

by Perry (1970), who noted that this change

> seems to occur at the transition from the conception of knowledge as a quantitative
>
> accretion of discrete rightness (including the discrete rightness of multiplicity in which
>
> everyone has a right to his own opinion) to the conception of knowledge as the
>
> qualitative assessment of contextual observations and relationships. (p. 210)

     At this stage, reading is buttressed by deep prior knowledge and driven by the reader's

purpose; readers can start at the middle, the end, or the beginning, and they can read to cull what

is useful, and ignore what is not, in order to construct knowledge through the processes of

"analysis, synthesis, and judgment" (Chall, 1983, p. 24). The challenge, then, is "to balance one's comprehension of the ideas read, one's analysis of them, and one's own ideas on them" (Chall, 1983, p. 24) while operating on the abstract level, willing and able to move among and between other text levels of interpretation and reading purposes.

In addition, Chall (1983) stated that readers at this stage need the audacity to have a point of view, "not for all time but for now" (Chall, 1983, p. 51), as well as "confidence and humility" (Chall, 1983, p. 51) as they test and confirm or reject ideas. Above all, they need "a feeling of entitlement" because they "[need] to believe that one is entitled to the knowledge that exists, to think about it, use it, and to 'make knowledge' as did those whose works they read" (Chall, 1983, p. 51).

Chall provided an illustrative example differentiating Stages 3, 4, and 5:

The difference in the nature of reading, as experienced at the three advanced stages, can be seen in the following answers to the question: Is what you just read true?

Stage 3: Yes, I read it in a book. The author said it was true.

Stage 4: I don't know. One of the authors I read said it was true, the other said it was not. I think there may be no true answers on the subject.

Stage 5: There are different views on the matter. But one of the views seems to have the best evidence supporting it, and I would tend to go along with that view. (Chall, 1983, p. 58)

In conclusion, Chall (1983) understood reading as a hierarchal process which emanates from a Piagetian "form of problem-solving" (Chall, 1983, p. 11) as readers accommodate new information in fresh ways of understanding the meaning of what they read and as they assimilate new information into previously confirmed ways of knowing. In addition, another one of the

tenets of Chall's scheme is that "reading depends upon full engagement with the text – its content, ideas, and values" (Chall, 1983, p. 12). Thus, "motivation, energy, daring, and courage are aspects to be considered in the full development of reading" (Chall, 1983, p. 12).

Theoretical Framework

While Chall's (1983) scheme provided an informative conceptual frame for how the processes of reading change as readers develop, there is a plethora of competing theories about reading and meaning-making that undergirds reading instruction and literary analysis. The most influential current theories are seemingly at odds with each other and often with what researchers and practitioners (as well as readers themselves) have found to be true about the process of reading. At the core of the debate between theoretical approaches to reading is a philosophical disagreement over who is in primary authority with regard to the meaning of a text. Several contemporary theories, such as Vygotsky's social constructivism and Rosenblatt's transactional reader response theory, suggest that the most important meanings are the ones that readers themselves construe within their social or personal context. In contrast, theories such as new criticism maintain that the creator of the text is the authority with regard to meaning, and it is the job of readers to pursue, then engage in conversation about, the meaning. It may be possible, however, through examination of these seemingly discordant theories, to see how each contributes to a better understanding of the very complicated process of becoming a better reader.

New Criticism

The theoretical approach to reading behind new criticism is simple: the words on the page are enough. During the early twentieth century, against a backdrop of reliance on historicism and sociocultural readings and new interest in far-flung emotive interpretations (Brooks, 1979),

new criticism proposed that effective readers have a "preference for emphasizing the text rather than the writer's motives and the reader's reaction" (Brooks, 1979, p. 600). To accomplish this, new criticism "stressed the common elements in all literature" (Brooks, 1979, p. 594) such as forms and structures that emerge as readers engage in what these critics termed "close reading" (Brooks, 1979, p. 600). Instead of expecting literature to correspond simply to a historical or personal set of facts about the authors and their day, this theory established boundaries of interpretation that honor reason. Ultimately, new criticism allowed a determination of the value and quality of texts, acknowledging that Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" invites and deserves a different sort of regard than "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" or an "editorial in the local county newspaper" (Brooks, 1979, p. 593).

Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader Response Theory

Rosenblatt's transactional reader response theory is based on the idea that readers derive text meaning as "a transaction between text and reader" during which "a new experience, the poem, is evoked" (Pantaleo, 2013, p. 126). This theory suggests that meaning is constructed in a very individual exchange with the text at a particular time in a reader's life. The "reading transaction" (Rosenblatt, 1988, p. 11) is essentially a process that begins with "some expectation, some tentative feeling" (p. 11) and solidifies into meaning as the reader identifies linguistic, syntactical, and structural patterns that assist them in constructing meaning. This process is a "complex, non-linear, self-correcting transaction between reader and text" (p. 12), which suggests that meaning resides in the text, but that reading is a process, a very personal process, in which readers indeed construe meaning.

Central to the application of this theory to reading instruction is the understanding that readers must take an effective, not a merely personal or a purely subjective, stance toward the

text (Rosenblatt, 1978). The two primary stances are efferent reading, which allows the reader to focus on "what is to be extracted and retained after the reading event," (p. 12), and aesthetic reading, which invites the reader to "adopts an attitude of readiness to focus attention on what is being lived through *during* the reading event" which "is felt to correspond to the text"(p. 13). The efferent stance is typically effective for informational texts, and the aesthetic for literary, but Rosenblatt suggested that texts exist on a continuum from efferent to aesthetic (1988). Rosenblatt also promoted a dynamic relationship between reading and writing, stating that "each can serve as a stimulus and support to the other" and that "the nature of the transaction between author and reader and the parallels in the reading and writing processes . . . make it reasonable to expect that the teaching of one can affect the student's operations in the other" (1988, p. 25). Furthermore, Rosenblatt also acknowledge the importance of speech, stating that "dialogue, between teacher and students, and interchange among students can foster growth and cross-fertilization in both the reading and writing processes" (1988, p. 26-27) because this fosters insight and "metalinguistic awareness" as students "engage in personally meaningful transactions with the texts of established authors" (1988, p. 27).

While many practitioners have misunderstood and misappropriated Rosenblatt's theory in an effort to honor diversity and encourage readers to take healthy risks, in its purist applications teachers remember that while "readers could make various defensible interpretations of their evocations, [Rosenblatt] stressed that some interpretations are more valid than others" (Pantaleo, 2013, p. 126). Furthermore, Rosenblatt distanced her theory from the "complete relativism" (Rosenblatt, 1988, p. 16) of the deconstructionists, who posited the "indeterminacy of meaning" (p. 15). Rosenblatt proposed that the validity of interpretation could be evaluated and agreed

upon when readers adopt the more appropriate stance, whether predominantly aesthetic or efferent (1988).

Vygotsky's Social Constructivism

Vygotsky's social constructivism model has had far-reaching influence in educational theory as well as in reading theory (Miller, 2011). Specifically, social constructivism acknowledges that children both reflect and create culture and knowledge as they move in and around in formal and informal educational contexts, and their primary tool for social connectivity is language (Vygotsky, 1978). An aspect of experience that is central to the application of Vygotsky's work to reading is what is termed private or inner speech, which powers cognitive growth and may reflect an effort to approach a task that is difficult (Miller, 2011). While this theory originally focused on the transfer of knowledge and skill "from interaction between a child and a more skilled person, usually an adult" (Miller, 2011, p. 191), the idea is often applied in peer reading protocols in which "peers often co-construct new (to them) knowledge that is a product of their collaboration" (Miller, 2011, p. 191). Vygotsky also

This conceptual frame and these theoretical bases for research methodologies drove the inquiry into students' reading stories as they had the opportunity to express how they made meaning from texts and how they saw themselves as readers.

Related Literature

This section will include literature on the following topics related to reading at the secondary level: reading processes necessary for secondary reading, barriers to continuous reading growth for adolescents, and interventions for high school readers, a section subdivided by interventions targeted at individual students, at small groups, and at whole class groupings. The following criteria were used to determine inclusion in this literature review. First, this study

includes research that focused on barriers, processes, and interventions for reading improvement of high school students exclusively, since these areas provide the basis for the research questions. Only studies completed since Biancarosa and Snow's (2006) seminal report to the Carnegie Corporation are included, since this study spurred burgeoning interest in secondary school literacy issues, but the most recent literature available will be the focus. In addition, the included studies examine reading comprehension as at least one direct and primary element of the study. The exceptions will be sources that assist in establishing a historical context for reading instruction at the high school level. Also included are studies on struggling or at-risk high schoolers who are reading on or below grade level since many students who experience greater-than-expected gains began high school as students in these populations. Studies that focus solely on students who are identified as special education programs or services are excluded, although studies with special education participants or subjects in heterogeneous regular classroom settings are included. Studies that focus on interventions targeting second-language learners are also excluded as their needs are outside the scope of this study. Last, studies of computer-based intervention programs are excluded in order to focus on classroom interventions that are available to all schools and teachers without financial concern.

Reading Processes Necessary for Secondary Reading

Goldman (2012) suggested that weak adolescent readers substitute synonyms in reordered paraphrases and make shallow connections outside the text. Additionally, Goldman (2012) synthesized the characteristics, reflecting five active processes, of successful adolescent readers: comprehension monitoring with utilization of multiple strategies, conceptual connectivity, generation of questions or explanations, use of logical links within the text, and dependence on their knowledge base, including structural features and vocabulary.

From a more systematic and theoretical perspective, successful readers in high school who have transitioned to Chall's (1983) "Reading to Learn" Stage 3 have mastered more than phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension strategies that are necessary to understand simple story structures. Fang (2008) compared and contrasted the characteristics of story and of expository reading then implied processes unique to successful "reading to learn." While reading rests on three "pillars of comprehension" relevant to both story and expository reading – knowledge of language and discourse structure, relevant background information, and self-regulating strategies such as visualizing and inferring (Fang, 2008) – these are not enough to sustain reading growth. First, readers must understand vocabulary that is technical in two specific ways: it contains domain-specific jargon, such scientific terms in an article on DNA, and everyday words that "assume nonvernacular meanings," such as the word *reading* applied figuratively meaning the analysis of DNA (Fang, 2008). Readers must also be able to deconstruct expansive nouns to understand the grammatical relationships embedded in lengthy clauses and phrases. For example, an effective reader understands pre-modifiers, head, and post-modifiers as a unit of meaning (such as "a seven-week CIA leak trials that focused new attention on the Bush administration's much-criticized handling") (Fang, 2008, p. 482), and recognizes nominalization, or abstractions that synthesize previous claims and continue building an argument ("this achievement" or "these revelations") (Fang, 2008, p. 480).

Possibly one of the problems inherent in conceptualizing effective reading instruction for adolescents who are on or nearly on grade level at the beginning of high school (mastery of Chall's Stage 3) is that "it is possible for those with high ability, motivation, and much practice to advance to Stages 4 and 5, perhaps with little additional formal instruction" (Chall, 1983, p. 70). However, instructional sequences that support adolescent readers' natural development

through Chall's Stages 3, 4, and 5 can be directly constructed. Stage 3 readers who are moving to Stage 4 (Multiple Viewpoints) benefit not only from independent reading for exposure to new perspectives in high-quality popular literature and newspapers (and now certainly informal reading on the Internet) inside and outside the classroom, but also wide reading across the content areas for knowledge in concert with systematic study of words and word parts (Chall, 1983). Stage 4 readers who are moving to Stage 5, which, according to Chall's scheme, presumably should include almost all high school students, benefit from being required to write compositions that synthesize and evaluate multiple points of view and to read widely "beyond their immediate needs" (Chall, 1983, p. 87). Both Stage 4 and Stage 5 readers do continue to benefit from formal and direct vocabulary study. However, these predominantly amorphous methods of acquisition are much more intuitive and responsive to curriculum and students than the more methodical approaches to teaching reading that helps readers acquire Stage 3 as they move from Stage 2 and use reading to learn for the first time: direct instruction in increasing abstract and unfamiliar vocabulary, concept development, word parts, syntax, and reading strategies; reading subject-area texts and informational texts from a single perspective and increasing more complex (in quantitative and qualitative measures) narrative genres; and opportunities to respond to the text through informal discussion and writings. The methods of acquisition, the nature of the reading skills, and the characteristics of the readers increase the challenge for teachers who wish to nurture growth in their students. Indeed, even the challenges that readers face as they lurch into Stages 4 and 5 "are varied and can be found among all kinds of students" (Chall, 1983, p. 115).

Barriers to Continuous Reading Growth for Adolescents

Since the processes of reading are beginning to be understood, the question that must follow is, then what kind of struggles block student progress? Chall (1983) explored many barriers to reading in her wide-ranging research based on her hierarchal model, and many other researchers have contributed to an understanding of what impedes student development. These barriers include individual student struggles as well as systemic and curriculum issues.

Individual student struggles. Chall (1983) suggested that many barriers emanate from a student's unwillingness to let go of strategies and approaches to text from an earlier stage, which can delay entry to the next stage, so it is significant to note the difficulty that struggling readers exhibit in moving to silent reading. Gilliam et al. (2011) explored the relationship between silent reading behavior and reading-to-oneself behaviors in 95 adolescents in a rural public school district in East Texas who ranged in age from 11 to 18. By observing students while they read test passages to themselves then answered comprehension questions, the researchers gathered evidence of a variety of reading behaviors, including silent reading, subvocalizations such as lip moving, and out-loud vocalization. One of the underlying principles of this study was that "efficient silent reading implies a strong correlation between a rapid reading rate and a high level of comprehension" (Gilliam et al., 2011, p. 120), suggesting that continued vocalizations were either a barrier to better reading or a characteristic of inefficient readers. In addition, the researchers note that "the normal developmental process of reading silently [progresses] from vocalization to subvocalization" (p. 126). The results showed that 40% read silently and 50% of the subjects read silently or moved their lips without producing sounds, whereas only 7% consistently vocalized when reading to themselves. While their findings regarding patterns of reading behaviors is interesting, noting that 25 different patterns emerged in this sample, they

simply asserted that "the patterns are as individual as the students producing them" (p. 125) and that "the patterns of change in behavior appear to represent the students' 'read-to-yourself' strategies for coping with the content, the interest, and the difficulty levels within each reading passage" (p. 125), yet they do not report any reading comprehension data nor do they correlate reading behaviors with text features or complexity. They do, however, note that this sound barrier between struggling readers and the world of silent reading is difficult to break, as "current literature is not replete with such instructional strategies" (p. 127).

Static requirements or "load" on the reader can also stall development. Specifically, with regards to readers' moving to high school-level reading, Chall (1983) asserted that students must be challenged to read increasingly difficult material for accuracy (Stage 3) or they may stay in the comfortable "less accurate, more contextual reading" (Chall, 1983, p. 12) of Stage 2. This is an especially important consideration for educators as they discover that secondary students can survive, even thrive, academically without reading in the content areas (Ness, 2008). Most students, Chall suggested, depend on formal schooling to provide reading experiences and requirements as a foundation for this sort of growth during Stages 3 to 5, including even free reading opportunities, as contrasted with the importance of home literacy immersion in the early years.

It isn't simply the missing mechanics of reading that can block students' progress; sometimes a reading issue that occurred earlier can impact them later. A barrier to reading progress in the early grades that can persist into the high school years is students' unwillingness to let go of reading for meaning at the expense of reading the actual words on the page. For example, readers who are delayed at Stage 1 often substitute for a word they have not decoded, a word with a similar meaning, but Chall (1983) suggested that this rush to read for meaning can

actually delay reading progress (Chall, 1983). Additionally, the movement from Chall's Stage 3 to Stage 4 is dependent on a strong knowledge base gained from independent reading from a single viewpoint combined with ever-increasing analytical and critical skills, and students who do not attain a strong knowledge base will struggle as reading demands increase (Chall, 1983).

Another barrier can be understood as either a problem with the medium or the message, or rather issues regarding print decoding or the ideas being communicated through the print (Chall, 1983). "Overemphasis on fluency in reading these (dense expository subject matter) texts can, thus, be detrimental" when students are reading the embedded clauses and phrases of complex sentences (Fang, 2008, p. 484)

Systemic barriers. Researchers have also identified several systemic barriers that impede reading progress at the secondary level. One barrier implicit in educational trends is the predominance of inductive activities in the early grades. This instructional focus on the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy at the expense of time to practice comprehension and to accumulate knowledge is often geared toward building readers' interest. This has an unintended consequence of limiting student knowledge and competence, which is needed in ever-increasing quantities to progress to Stage 3 and beyond (Chall, 1983).

Along the same lines, Lesley (2008) posited that a major barrier to reading success for marginalized adolescents is the lack of interpretive authority that they experience in a typical high school setting, effectively separating their authentic literacy from school-sanctioned, mainstream literacy and dominant forms of discourse. Fang (2008) noted that the authoritative language of expository texts developed using a technical vocabulary, declarative sentences, passive voice, and generalized or virtual participants increases the perceived distance between students and texts, but Lesley (2008) pointed to a similar distance for adolescent readers of story

texts when students could not directly relate to the specifics of a character's life. Additionally, the story of family dysfunction and violence of a white adolescent did not produce a strong critical response in Lesley's (2008) African-American and Hispanic adolescent readers in a voluntary literacy group, suggesting that for struggling readers, at least, personal distance, or "positionality of the reader in response to perspectives presented and omitted in the ideological underpinning of texts" (Lesley, 2008, p. 181) can effectively function as a barrier between the reader and access to the meaning of a text. This grounded theory study examined the relationship between struggling adolescent readers and dominant discourse forms. Ultimately Lesley (2008) concluded that "the students' own discursive authority was an integral part of fostering critical literacy" and that "the non-school text [Tupac Shakur's "Life Through My Eyes"] proved to be essential for students to be able to develop such discursive authority and critical reading" (p. 188). However, as interesting as the findings of this study are, the most noteworthy conclusion was that when students established their own interpretive authority with a non-school text, they engaged in "parallel dialogue with very little direct conversation with one another" (Lesley, 2008, p. 187), which illustrates one of the issues with the application of critical theory to adolescent reading instruction: its goal is to empower readers to resist dominant interpretations and put forth their own in order to create "unique patterns of discourse" in which students "seek no external validation about the meanings they are constructing" (Lesley, 2008, p. 187). As the philosophy in many education preparation programs as well as in university English programs, this individualistic philosophy may be undermining its own hoped-for outcome, if indeed, as Lesley stated, critical literacy supports both an efferent and aesthetic response to a text (Lesley, 2008). Additionally, Lesley concluded that more research is needed into how educators might "bridge" non-school literacies with dominant forms for the benefit of these students, a

relationship which drove this study as the phenomenon of interest was the relationship between struggling adolescent readers and dominant discourse forms. While it may have simply ended where it began, this study is noteworthy because it inadvertently acknowledged as a primary barrier critical theory itself: "Until we began to read a text that the students identified with and had personal connections with through the popular media, the students did not begin to present non-school forms of discourse in response to the texts, and the pedagogical bridge I was hoping to foster did not appear" (Lesley, 2008, p. 187). Yet the students' responses, while enthusiastic, did not reveal any connections between school-based or mainstream literacies and their own authentic responses (the missing "bridge" for which Lesley was aiming), but instead revealed more about themselves than their understanding of the text. Consequently, a critical theory perspective may indeed be a barrier when applied too soon and too indiscriminately.

One of the most disturbing systemic barriers illuminated through the lens of Chall's (1983) scheme furthers understanding of the potentially wide and deep negative impact of initiatives such as No Child Left Behind on the development of many students:

Acceleration is needed to maintain early reading momentum. To keep it up and to keep developing further, the student needs to be challenged sufficiently to material that meets his achievement and intellectual needs. Indeed, a combination of acceleration and enrichment – accommodation and assimilation – is need for development through all the stages not only by precocious but by all readers. If the wide range of abilities in a classroom makes it difficult to give basic instruction at the student's reading level rather than on the level of his grade placement, it becomes even more essential to have plenty of books available on higher levels for independent reading. (Chall, 1983, p. 113)

Chall (1983) concluded that "students may become deficient in their cognitive development, although their original problem may have been decoding alone" (p. 120), a chilling reminder that continuous improvement is not simply an ideal but a necessity for all students.

Investigating the inherently reciprocal relationship between processes and barriers may lead to many more insights on how to assist adolescents as they become more effective readers. Biancarosa and Snow (2006) set the course for researchers, philanthropists, and practitioners in their seminal work, *Reading Next*. In this report, they asserted that educators know what works to improve reading comprehension for struggling older students, but conceded that they lack an overall strategy and detail knowledge about how to best synthesize existing programs and practices. The report includes 15 characteristics in some kind of combination, ranging from direct strategy instruction to extended time and diverse texts, and reflects a sharp call to press the conversation forward from the emphasis on reading in the early grades to the high schools.

Interventions for High School Readers

A small number of researchers and practitioners seemed to have heeded the call, and research on reading interventions for adolescent students seems to be trickling in. A search of the three leading reading research journals over the past five years produced only seven of even tangentially relevant studies, and one of these (Williams, 2014) was simply a reworking of two studies from 2005. However, a few high school students are becoming better readers, and some teachers and researchers are studying the relationship between comprehension improvements and classroom interventions from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. This section of the literature review examines studies of interventions as they might be implemented: one-on-one interventions, small-group interventions, and whole-class or school culture interventions.

Individual interventions. For the purposes of this literature review, individual interventions will be identified as one-on-one strategies that may or may not be delivered in a pull-out model. Several themes emerged when focusing on strategies that attempt to impact students' reading comprehension ability, including general one-on-one reading interventions, mentoring, and advocacy.

Tutorial settings. Interventions targeting individual students in tutorial-type settings are often best begun after collecting data about the student's true reading process using observation-based instruments such as Over-the-Shoulder Miscue Analysis (Oyler et al., 2011). Then teacher or tutors can implement targeted interventions appropriate for high school readers.

Repeated readings. The persistence of fluency issues into the high school years is a difficult issue for teachers and readers alike, and historically it has been assumed that this early aspect of automaticity would be mastered in elementary school. A meta-analysis by Edmonds et al. (2009) reported that fluency interventions did not yield statistically significant results in reading comprehension. In an effort to impact fluency specifically, Hawkins, Hale, Sheeley, and Ling (2011) studied the effectiveness of the repeated readings strategy in combination with two other interventions for six special education students who were in regular education classrooms but had been diagnosed Specific Learning Disabilities in reading. This experimental quantitative study using an alternating treatment design included six participants from a convenience sample who were enrolled in special education in an urban high school and were in the 10th or 11th grades but reading at least one grade level below actual grade level. The participants read 400-word passages twice under three conditions: a control condition in which the students were instructed to read aloud at their normal pace, repeated reading condition in which read-aloud errors were identified and corrected before the students read again, and repeated reading plus

vocabulary preview in which students learned pertinent terms defined for them prior to the repeated reading intervention. Then the participants' oral reading fluency rates, reading comprehension scores, and reading comprehension rates (dependent variables) were tallied and analyzed from all three conditions using "visual analysis" of graphs of each student's pre- and post-intervention scores on all three measures. Researchers reported three primary results: oral reading fluency measures for all students increased with the repeated reading intervention, reading comprehension scores were mixed, and the repeated reading plus vocabulary preview condition resulted in comprehension rate gains in only half of the students. The effectiveness of the repeated reading intervention itself, even on such a small sample, for these students was not clear because it was paired with error correction, but these two strategies together appeared to be influential in the improvements in these six students. Overall, students' scores in all areas improved after the treatment cycle, suggesting that the alternating interventions were effective: effect sizes for repeated readings as computed at .24, and the researchers assert that the ES was "large for the all comparisons" (Hawkins et al., 2011, p. 65). The researchers also found through a questionnaire that the participants "liked doing the reading activities" and "[thought] the activities helped [them] read better" (Hawkins et al., 2011, p. 64), both important considerations with high school students. The limitations of this study were many: the students were assessed only using passages they had practiced, so whether or not their comprehension ability was impacted is unclear; prior vocabulary knowledge for each passage was not determined, so it is unclear whether or not they learned the words or had previously acquired them; and the instructors implemented a third procedure with the students during the treatment (error correction), which may or may not have impacted the results. In addition, generalizability is limited by the fact that the study occurred in a single high school setting with a very small

sample. This study also highlighted the problem in general with reading strategy instruction that Goldman (2012) noted: these interventions "[fall] short because comprehension itself becomes more complex and expansive as students mature and progress from grade to grade" (p. 97).

Student choice of text. When the student's struggle is less technical and more perceptual, researchers have found that allowing students to choose their own texts, sharing what they have read with important others, and utilizing the "say something" strategy (which allows the student to make assertions, ask questions, and otherwise initiate "roaming" within the text with the tutor/teacher) helps struggling teen readers "to view [themselves] and [their own] literacy in a positive way" (Oyler et al., 2011). The component of individual choice is a powerful tool for working with high school students.

Mentor texts. The mentor texts strategies fit with Biancarosa and Snow (2006) in their call for "strategic tutoring," yet their vision for students individually is beautifully enhanced by efforts that extend beyond even strategic tutoring, such as helping students (especially disenfranchised students) discover a "mentor text" through which they "negotiate the tension between acculturation and assimilation while building from [their] oral literacy strengths" (Oyler et al., 2011, p. 42). While teachers of all high school students are likewise exhorted to build on strengths, this is a potentially strong strategy, although finding such a text requires a committed, one-on-one relationship between an adolescent reader and a knowledgeable educator. For many students, this sort of commitment may be necessary and will surely be rewarded.

Small-group reading instruction and interventions. Many reading comprehension strategies for use in high school classrooms are designed for small groups of learners in a variety of configurations and in different places in the reading comprehension process.

ART of Reading. Interestingly, sometimes interventions specifically designed for individual implementation become slightly more effective when paired with small-group interaction. This was the case with The ART of Reading Program, a three-part strategy that was developed by researchers to improve the reading comprehension of a group of 115 inner-city high school students who were voluntarily participating in a summer enrichment program (McCallum et al., 2011). Over the course of two weeks, students participated in the control and two treatment conditions in a large lecture hall, each session completed with clear instructions given by different researchers but using a procedural-integrity checklist and inter-rater agreement on the scoring of the answers. In the control condition, students were told to read the passage and answer comprehension questions silently. In the ask, read, tell condition, students were led through a scripted process of self-questioning the text based the title, reading the text, and silently telling themselves what they had just read. In the ART-peer discussion condition, students followed the same protocol as in the ART condition but additionally were to question each other and self-correct their understandings. After each condition, students answered 10 comprehension-type questions, which yielded the data for the analysis. Results suggested that the ART intervention did not yield any difference in reading comprehension scores from the control group, but that the ART-peer discussion protocol was slightly more effective, although not a statistically significant difference, in assisting student reading comprehension scores (t (109) = 0.808, d = .06). This study presented many limitations, including the fact that there was no data collected on the students' reading levels prior to treatment, nor was the reading comprehension of individual students tracked through time regarding the treatment conditions. The most interesting limitation, however, is that researchers conceded that the control group may have been implementing the ART protocol without being directed to do so, since it is a series of

unobservable behaviors often taught in classrooms throughout the grade levels, severely limiting the strength of any conclusion based on this study. This does suggest several possibilities for further investigation: does simply reading makes students better at reading? and to what degree do students benefit from social interaction following silent reading?

Reciprocal teaching. Reciprocal teaching (Apthorp & Clark, 2007; Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, Goldman, 2012; Santa, 2006) is an intervention that teaches students to follow this four-step process as readers: question, clarify, predict, and summarize, usually in a group setting. A meta-analysis conducted by Edmonds et al. (2009) of 29 studies that included two studies of this model and determined that the effect sizes were moderate to high in the various studies, ranging from ES = .35 to ES = 1.42 for the different treatment protocols. Edmonds et al. (2009) also suggested that the effectiveness of the reciprocal teaching intervention may be influenced by the type of student groupings.

Metacognition. Finally, what these processes and models have in common is a metacognitive base, which many researchers agree is the most effective way to help students increase their proficiency as readers (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Ness, 2008; Santa, 2006). This term encompasses many procedures for helping students learn to monitor their own comprehension and engage in self-questioning strategies, becoming self-aware as readers in what Ness (2008) emphasized should be "naturalistic settings." These strategies promise great reward and increasing independence as they build on their gift areas. Both social and emotional needs may need to take precedence over the students' academic needs, and researchers have found great success with curricula and strategies that allow to break large projects into smaller pieces and to focus on their strengths, not just their deficiencies (Yssel, Prater, & Smith, 2010).

Small-group discussion. Some effective strategies simply defy what educators think is known about teaching and learning because teenagers are a bit unpredictable. For example, one study found that even an opportunity for small-group peer discussion with no process, instruction, or guiding questions seemed to foster the greatest increase in comprehension for a group of at-risk students (McCallum et al., 2011).

Whole-class interventions, classroom culture, and whole-school programs. The primary socio-emotional task of adolescence is identity formation, and everything that has meaning for them occurs in a social context (Coombs, 2012). Therefore, it is prudent to examine studies addressing classroom culture as well as instructional strategies that occur within classrooms, especially as Coombs (2012) considers Alverman's suggestion that "school culture is *making* struggling readers out of some youth" (2006, p. 95).

Classroom teaching and practice. First, Slavin, Cheung, Groff, and Lake (2008) concluded their synthesis of 33 studies with the observation that the most effective reading intervention programs all have one thing in common: "these approaches focus on improving classroom teaching" and on strengthening "the core of classroom practice," especially by facilitating peer-to-peer interaction (Slavin et al., 2008, p. 309). Pereles, Omdal, and Baldwin (2009) also asserted that all classroom teachers must ensure that solid teaching principles form the basis for effective lesson plans for all students at all levels, including the following (listed in order of highest to lowest effect): comparing and contrasting, note-taking and summarizing, recognition, homework and independent practice, integration of symbols, cooperative learning, setting objectives and providing feedback, applying the scientific process, and advance organizers (Pereles et al., 2009). These skills and culture-building habits in a classroom

established on effective teaching set a strong foundation for all reading instruction and may supersede any specific technique or intervention in terms of effectiveness.

   Oral reading fluency. However, it is worth investigating the conditions under which readers exhibit growth. Goering and Baker (2010) reported very optimistic results from their mixed-methods study that examined the impact of oral reading fluency activities on both fluency and reading comprehension of 16 struggling 10th graders in an intensive intervention classroom setting. The quantitative aspect utilized a quasi-experimental design (pre-test/posttest but no control group), and the qualitative aspect utilized a predominant axiomatic perspective. The intervention included six cycles of a series of paired repeated readings focusing on different text types in rotating small groups, which prepared students for dramatic oral readings of self-selected texts in front of the whole class. Pre- and post-intervention GORT 4 (Gray Oral Reading Test) scores and interviews were analyzed as well as observations of their classroom interactions collected in field notes. Quantitatively, a statistically significant difference with large effect sizes were found in all three measures on the GORT 4: fluency, comprehension, and the composite (t (16) = -3.646, p<.05, r = .67; t (16) = -4.440, p<.05, r = .74; t (16) = 4.474, p<.05, r = .75). Qualitatively, the findings suggested that students found the intervention class less intimidating, that they were certain they had become better readers and could articulate how and why, and that the complex social world of adolescence in an intervention setting could both contribute to a sense of community and self-confidence, or destroy them "on any given day" (Goering & Baker, 2010, p. 72). Overall the students reported that the experience was "enjoyable" (Goering & Baker, 2010, p. 73), but researchers noticed that "progress was hindered at times due to both troubled peer relationships and with friendly relationships that overpowered

the undertakings of the class" (Goering & Baker, 2010, p. 73). In conclusion, the positive must be more prevalent than the negative for the intervention to have its potential positive effect.

Apprentice model. Finding and keeping that balance between relationships and instruction is a challenge in most classrooms, but it is a challenge worth meeting when working with adolescents. An important and related concern for students is to keep them engaged and empowered in school. Biancarosa and Snow (2006) clarified a specific process that may be successful for engaging and empowering these students. In the apprenticeship model of reading instruction (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006), the teacher encourages students to read like specialists in a content area (i.e. read like a mathematician or an historian). Early research on implementation suggests that it is "beginning to demonstrate positive results" (Goldman, 2012, p. 101) and may provide the best literacy foundation for 21st-century learners. At the heart of this model is the intentional planning for social safety, personal identity expression, cognitive development, and knowledge-building, and it is ultimately a way of creating safe, collaborative space in which students can think as they learn to read more effectively (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006).

Strategy instruction. Once a supportive environment is established, then teachers can focus on reading comprehension-based methods of instructing. Strategy instruction (Apthorp & Clark, 2007; Biancarosa & Snow, 2006) is a specific range of activities that teachers lead their students through so that they can leave the students on their own and strong by removing supports while scaffolding (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006). Apthorp & Clark (2007) defined strategy instruction as "specific, learned procedures that foster active, competent, self-regulated, and intentional learning" which teachers instruct "students to use and articulate," transforming the role of teacher to coach (n.p.). Goldman (2012) asserted that strategy instruction is the most common approach taken in classrooms across the disciplines to improve reading comprehension.

However, researchers discovered that single-strategy interventions did not impact student comprehension overall, which began a change in research focus to the coordination of multiple strategies, such as reciprocal teaching (Goldman, 2012), addressed earlier in this paper as a small-group strategy.

Discussion-based classroom environments. Discussion-based whole classroom interventions and programs, such as paideia seminar, questioning the author, and instructional conversation, have been found in several meta-analyses cited by Goldman (2012) to positively impact students' comprehension of the texts being discussed, especially in smaller classroom environments, but did not consistently improve students' higher-order thinking skills regarding texts, which of course is the purported purpose of those programs. Some researchers suggested that teachers shift their identity to that of "coach" (Apthorp & Clark, 2007) or mentor-readers as the teachers engage in activities such as read-alouds in which they share their own responses and questions as they make meaning.

Critical theory. It is also true that most teenagers' greatest barrier to truly comprehending (when their struggles are not decoding and fluency) is setting aside their own ideas about the world to make room for what they are reading, often through whole-class discussions or targeted approaches to texts. One educator in South Carolina found that explicitly teaching critical theory to her ninth graders increased their anecdotal evidence of true comprehension (Walker, 2011). Applying the lenses of feminism and Marxism also helped them unearth some of their own biases (Walker, 2011), which is the point of all good, deep reading and encourages students to take ownership of their own reading.

Close reading. A more focused approach to these shifting roles of both teacher and student was taken by participants in Fisher and Frey's (2013) study in a school district that

provided extensive professional development in how to develop a close reading protocol. Close

reading involves these elements: a short, complex passage of appropriate challenge and rigor;

"minimal front-loading" (Fisher & Frey, 2013, p. 34) of vocabulary and concepts; multiple

readings over time driven by a specific reading purpose; a progression of questions scaffolding

from detail to inference that requires students to make specific and apt text references; extended

interaction between teacher and students centered on the text; a culminating product in which

students use the text; and "an expectation that student struggle is necessary for learning to occur"

(Fisher & Frey, 2013, p. 26). Close reading shifts responsibility for meaning making to the

students through a series of questions carefully planned by the teacher. This phenomenological

study explored three research questions regarding teacher implementation of close reading,

challenges and benefits as perceived by the teachers, and the perspective of the students engaged

in this instructional practice. The participants included 45 teachers from grades four to 12,

including 20 high school teachers randomly selected, and 327 students chosen by their principals

to participate in the study. The researchers conducted interviews with the teachers focusing on

their implementation of the close reading protocol and focus groups with the students, both

utilizing semi-structured interviews. Their analysis of the data from interviews and focus groups

included data reduction in several rounds using the constant comparative method, which resulted

in grounded codes reflecting an inter-rater reliability of .89. In addition, they kept and compared

notes about their own thoughts and experiences throughout the analysis of this emic process. A

narrative approach guided the synthesis of the data, then five purposefully selected participants

completed member checks, resulting in no changes to the researchers' understanding of the

phenomenon. The findings suggested that students and teachers agree that this protocol shifts

responsibility for reading, discussing, and learning to the student, which results in a fatigue for

the students. However, "the most common theme, representing 100% ($n = 51$) of the student focus groups, was that 'close readings are more interesting that regular reading' " (Fisher & Frey, 2013, p. 35). The researchers found that both students and teachers had positive experiences with close reading, although the shift was so significant for the teachers that they often questioned whether they were still good teachers or not. While it is true that the limitations of volunteer bias and response bias, in addition to the difficulties of interpreting self-reported data, Fisher and Frey (2013) suggested that students appreciate and benefit from this process, becoming more engaged and analytical readers of complex texts, even if it did make them very tired.

Integrated approaches. Reading improvement, it is evident, does not happen in isolation, and research on whole-school literacy programs is promising. Munoz's (2007) evaluation of an unbundled version of Pearson's Ramp Up to Advanced Literacy program found that implementation of only the literacy component positively impacted the reading growth of high school students. The tightly structured two-year program designed to accelerate the reading growth of students two or more years behind in literacy measures incorporates many elements of research-based effective reading programs at the secondary level, including independent reading, read-alouds, and other metacognitive strategies; work periods for whole and small group reading and writing instruction; and cross-age tutoring of younger readers as a service learning component. The effectiveness of the program after the first year of implementation was examined by comparing the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills reading subtest scores of schools whose students who had experienced one year of the program ($n = 12$) with control schools ($n = 9$) in a large urban district, ultimately including 3082 students, which was many more than the minimum required sample size as a result of a power analysis which yielded 128.

The researcher focused on the analysis of the impact on the reading scores of two groups of students, the novice readers (the lowest scoring group in the baseline measure) and the apprentice readers (the second-lowest scoring group in the baseline measure). They found that the effect size using Cohen's *d* was moderate for the novice group (ES = +0.30), not significant for the apprentice group (ES = -0.12), and significant for the novice and apprentice groups combined (ES = 0.18). Not only did the lowest performing group of students show significant increases in reading comprehension scores, but also the gap on the CTBS post-tests between white and minority students closed dramatically for the schools that implemented the Ramp Up to Advanced Literacy program to a "negligible gap of 1.5 points" (Munoz, 2007, p. 102), whereas the mean gap for control schools was 11.4 points. Munoz (2007) also pointed out, however, that these results are "less clear" about "why and how student learning improved" (p. 104) and that this sort of upward trajectory in program results are often difficult to maintain.

Summary

In conclusion, perhaps the important skill for students is persistence, and the critical need is primarily metacognitive – for students to understand how memory is organized and how learning is structured (Santa, 2006) so that they themselves can facilitate their own, independent reading and learning. There is urgency in our search for what will help our students become ready for whatever lies beyond the high school horizon, be it work, military, or college. Across the country, districts, states, and schools of education are implementing reading initiatives tied to teacher certification, such as South Carolina's Read to Succeed, a legislative initiative which requires that all high school teachers become endorsed in teaching content-area literacy. Ironically, it is certain that student achievement in reading is declining, but it is uncertain about how to reverse this trend. The few interventions that seem to have promising results have little

research behind them, and most interventions that have some level of efficacy seem to rely on

novelty for their impact when there is some conclusive data.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experience of improvement in reading comprehension for adolescent readers who have made gains greater than what might be predicted based on previous growth in reading comprehension measures. Interviews, story chart artifacts created by each participant, and observations of students' process and self-talk while reading short passages were collected from 12 students at Placid High (pseudonym). Analysis was conducted using Hycner's framework to discover the essence of these students' experiences as improving readers. Methodologically, this study attempted to ascertain shared characteristics and experiences that influenced the reading comprehension growth of these adolescents through inductive study of all data. This chapter begins with the phenomenological design of the study and research questions, followed by explanations of the participants, setting, and procedures. Next, the researcher's role, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques are described. Finally, trustworthiness and ethical considerations are addressed.

Design

A phenomenological approach was an apt fit for this study of student's perceptions of their reading improvement experience. As Barnacle (2004) stated paraphrasing Husserl, "the lived experience of being in the world becomes a legitimate basis for knowledge" (p. 58). As a phenomenology, this study attempted to honor "the study of lived experiences of persons, the view that these experiences are conscious ones (van Manen, 2006), and the development of descriptions of the essences of these experiences, not explanations or analyses" (2004, p. 77), resulting in an emerging, dynamic design responsive to participants as the study progresses

(Creswell, 2013). Through this study, I intended to understand more fully the essence of the experience, both lived and perceived, of these few adolescent readers – what commonalities are woven through their very individual experiences of improving as readers? How might this inform better practice and research into the subtleties and difficulties of reading at such a level? Challenge, however, will exist in the unresolvable tension between van Manen's (2006) insistence in phenomenology on the primacy of unreflective lived experiences and the reflectivity that Dewey (1910) asserted is central to the act of reading.

Research Questions

This study sought to explore the ways that adolescent readers perceive their own improvement as readers by presenting their voices speaking to their own growth. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: What influences have impacted the lived experiences of these students as improving readers?

RQ2: What barriers to reading improvement existed for these students?

RQ3: What high school-related reading experiences, if any, hold meaning for adolescent readers?

RQ4: What characteristics are shared among adolescent readers who have experienced better-than-expected growth?

Setting

The setting for this study was Placid High School (a pseudonym), which is a medium-sized (1500 students), southeastern comprehensive suburban high school with both academic and vocational onsite programs. According to the school's state report card for 2014, the school's achievement and demographic data reflect typical score ranges for similar groups of students

when compared to similar high schools in the state (S.C. Department of Education, 2015). The scores of the lowest performing students reflect their struggle to attain mastery of grade-level reading skills; in 2014, 76.9% of students passed the end-of-course test for English I, a course required for students who were not eligible to begin taking high school courses in middle school. Yet the impact of these students' performance indicators on overall school quality measures are counterbalanced by a large percentage of students in Advanced Placement, gifted, and honors classes. Almost 26% of the student body of Placid High School participate in the academic gifted and talented program, as compared to 31.2% of students at similar schools and to about 17% of students at median high schools in the state. Regarding advanced academic study, 29.5% of students were enrolled in Advanced Placement courses, and 60.9% of those students were considered "successful" (as compared to 37.5% and 58.3%, respectively, of students at similar high schools) on the associated exams as reported on the state report card.

Additionally, the school has been attempting to implement a modified response-to-intervention model for the most at-risk freshmen, while encouraging more students to take rigorous Advanced Placement courses. There has also been a district-wide professional development focus for several years on student reading improvement and vocabulary acquisition; however, students may or may not have been instructed by teachers who implemented all (or any) of the initiatives. These factors suggest this site was an appropriate and informative choice for this study, especially as I sought to determine how students grow as readers with or without instructional support.

Participants

This study included 12 high school students who experienced a data point or a personal turning point at which they exhibited improvement in measures of reading comprehension.

Additionally, participants completed at least one year of high school prior to the year of the study in order to benefit from the increased opportunities for growth in these older students. Because few students experience this phenomenon and the potential lack of available reading comprehension data, mixed purpose sampling was determined to be appropriate, since it is a "combination approach" often utilized when "multiple research interests and needs" exist in a single study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 185). More specifically, criterion, snowball, purposive, and maximal sampling were used to identify the participants, which ultimately yielded 12 participants.

The primary justification for number of participants, however, springs from the operationalized application of the concept of saturation of data in nonprobabilitstic samples as established by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), who found that the larger themes typically emerge from as few as six participants and saturation can be achieved with as few as 12 participants, especially regarding purposive sampling as is in place for this study. However, beyond seeking to include "enough" participants in this phenomenology, the researcher applied the definition of "saturation" as stated by Guest et al. (2006): "the point in data collection and analysis when new information produces little or no change to the codebook" or "theme identification" (p. 65). In order to achieve saturation, I completed field notes and informal thematic notes as the data collections progressed, seeking themes while being open to patterns that might emerge as new participants shared their experiences. This openness proved beneficial as the inadvertent scheduling of participants required data collection from the oldest students then moving to the youngest due to school-based scheduling constraints. While including participants who exhibited great variance regarding many aspects of their reading experiences, what appeared to be a new theme became apparent to the researcher with the inclusion of the

three youngest participants, but these new patterns were reflected in previously conducted interviews as well. Talking with these less experienced readers illuminated several themes from a different angle.

The sampling procedures were conducted concurrently and sequentially, from criterion and snowball concurrently to purposive and to maximal. First, criterion sampling yielded a list of approximately 60 potential participants who had experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). In order to implement this sampling procedure, I accessed testing data through the school's database, Enrich/Test View, which includes reading comprehension data, specifically Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) scores from testing benchmarks in ninth grade as well as the ACT /PLAN test, the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test, the SAT I: Reasoning Test, and the South Carolina High School Assessment Program for older students. Additionally, Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) data became available at the end of first semester, enlarging the data and access to potential participants. The criterion for receiving an invitation to participate in the study was to have shown a better-than-expected increase in reading comprehension scores between any two of these measures available in the database. Archer's (2010) definition of ambitious growth as one standard deviation above the mean for Lexile growth based on starting level was used as a criterion for the potential participants who had a series of Lexile measures in the database, while others were identified based on significant percentile improvement on any two successive standardized measures of reading comprehension. Not all tests taken by students are available in the database, and there were significantly different test administrations from year to year, therefore rendering impossible the consistent use of one set of measures to identify participants.

These different methods of applying criterion sampling allowed me to identify students who made ambitious gains even though the data collected and archived by the school district was

incomplete. Therefore, the criterion sampling procedures included the following processes. For MAP scores or SRI Lexiles, the improvement may have been reflected between any two successive testing sessions in high school (for example, Fall 2013 to Winter 2013 for first-time freshmen, or Fall 2012 to Fall 2013 for repeating ninth graders) and could be evaluated as ambitious through the use of Archer's formula (2010). For PSAT scores, the criterion may have been met by reading comprehension percentile scores from sophomore- and junior-year test administrations (most of the students at the school setting take this test twice) or on sophomore PSAT and any subsequent SAT I verbal score after accounting for the different scoring systems and for expected growth as published by the College Board (Score Change from PSAT/NMSQT to SAT, 2008). The same process was utilized for PLAN to ACT scores, utilizing the ACT-SAT Concordance Tool (2008).

Second, snowball sampling was used to identify potential participants by involving key informants (Creswell, 2013), the teachers across all content areas who recognized reading growth in their students through tracking of classroom performance on reading tasks or through informal observation of students whom they would describe as engaged, accurate (Traxler & Tooley, 2008), and reflective readers (Dewey, 1910). I contacted teachers and informed them of this opportunity for their students via email, then I accessed the test records for those students to determine if they had indeed achieved ambitious gains. While one teacher submitted the names of three students whom she felt had made gains during the school year, no students were invited to participate using this sampling procedure as none of the three had indeed made ambitious gains during high school. In addition, students who were aware of the study were encouraged to refer other students who they believed had become better readers based on their classroom and personal interactions. Participants were also invited to self-select on a volunteer basis that

reflected interest in the study and a self-perception as an improving reader; however, no participants were discovered using these last two procedures.

Since these methods yielded more potential participants than necessary for the study, purposive and maximal sampling were used to invite and recruit participants to include in the study. Utilizing purposive sampling (Gall et al., 2007) allowed the selection of participants whose referral profiles tended to be "information rich" with regard to the focus of this study (Gall et al..2007, p. 178), specifically significance of experience, positive interest in their own reading gains as a phenomenon, and willingness to share in a manner that will help me "achieve an in-depth understanding of [the] selected individuals" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 178). Last, maximal sampling was implemented to assure that this study included students who represent the many facets of the lived experience under investigation (Creswell, 2013). I actively sought to include students from diverse backgrounds and reading histories, including but not limited to ethnicity or race, age, grade level, course enrollment, academic record, and perception of selves as readers.

It is true that this approach, which "increases the likelihood that the findings will reflect differences or different perspectives" (Creswell, 2013, p. 157), may seem at odds with the purpose of this study, which is to discover similar characteristics and processes that are shared among these readers. However, the variety in methods of discovering potential participants in the criterion sampling reflects interest in exploring the spectrum of student experiences with reading improvement, since a wide net could potentially include students ranging from at-risk students who struggled to pass the previous state-mandated graduation test (a passing score is Level 2, which reflects ability to deal with texts at the MAP score of 209, about a seventh grade reading level) to potential National Merit Finalists. Maximum variation sampling supported this goal, since "it involves selecting cases that illustrate the range of variation in the phenomenon to be

studied" and can assist the researcher in determining "whether common themes, patterns, and outcomes cut across this variation" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 182).

Procedures

After successfully defending the research proposal and applying for and obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix F), formal permission to conduct the study in the district and at Placid High School was requested and approved through the associate superintendent of instruction who communicated with the building principal. Potential participants were identified by accessing historical test data in the database, by contacting teachers via email who might serve as key informants to request that they submit the names of students in whom they have seen reading improvement, and by promoting self-selected participation in the study through posters, announcements on the school website, and student-to-student recruitment. Next, the sampling procedures were used to determine potential participants who were then invited by personal contact, specifically by my informal conversations with more than 20 students in order to explain this opportunity. Students who chose to participate were required to return the consent form, which complies with all Liberty University and IRB requirements (see Appendix G).

Data were collected from each participant utilizing three data collections: an interview, an artifact, and an observation of the reading process. The rationale for the sequence of data collections was based on both research methodologies and practicality. The interview questions (see Appendix A) were designed to move from building rapport to sharing perceived influences on the experience of becoming a better reader (Creswell, 2013), which allowed the participants to become more comfortable with me before sharing their story and engaging in a reading task. Practically speaking, high school students have very busy schedules, which necessitates

gathering as much data from a single session as possible, hence the intertwining of the interview and the artifact, with the close proximity of the recording.

First, the individual interviews were audio recorded (through a microphone connected to a computer recording on the hard drive and backed up on Vocaroo, a free online recorder). Within 24 hours, an initial hearing was completed accompanied by reflective note-taking, then a second listening was completed while transcribing. Participants had the opportunity to check the transcriptions against the recording as well as against their own intentionality, and they were invited to offer suggestions, corrections, or interpretations to be added to the transcriptions.

The participants completed story charts as part of their interviews, and after all interviews were completed, I created a synthesis of the story chart artifacts by fully and correctly integrating all stories on one large wall chart, which participants also had the opportunity to member-check.

 After each interview was complete, each student was observed reading a grade-level selection. This reading observation was recorded to capture both their self-talk and external evidence of their reading process. An online screencasting program, Screencast-O-Matic, was used to capture both the participants' voice and the screen from which they were reading. The screen recorder on the computer that was used for the reading observation also served as a backup recording device. Both the visual of the curser on the computer screen, which tracked the participants' pace and process through the excerpt, and the audio of the students' self-talk were preserved as expressions of the reading experience. Within 24 hours, the screencast of the observed reading session was viewed while taking descriptive and reflective field notes (Gall et al., 2007), which were followed by transcription of the students' comments and by noting the cursor movements (Traxler & Tooley, 2008). Participants were invited to provide member-checks at this stage as well. While informal theme analysis was conducted during the data

collection period, the formal process of data analysis was completed after all data were collected, as previously outlined.

Researcher's Role

As the human instrument observing and interpreting, I strove to be mindful of how my experiences as a reader and as a teacher may have shaped my perceptions of the participants' stories, not to assert the authority of my own experiences but instead to set them aside to "[suspend] [my] understanding in a reflective move that cultivates curiosity" (Creswell, 2013, p. 83). In addition, my role as researcher was shaped by my position within the site. I am currently an English teacher and department head at Placid High School (pseudonym), and I have committed my entire 25-year career to improvement efforts at this site. This year my teaching responsibilities include Advanced Placement Literature and Composition and Advanced Placement Language and Composition. I am aware that administrators, teachers, and students who know me perceive that I am a strong reader of complex texts and that I am an experienced teacher who often shares her failures in the classroom. I have intentionally developed a reciprocal relationship with the teachers in my department, and I have only served in an evaluative role for two teachers in my school (one outside my department who is no longer employed at our school and another who is a teacher in her fourth year at our school). In addition, I have served on an English I curriculum team in a collaborative capacity under the experience and authority of teachers with greater expertise, albeit less experience, than I. Therefore, my working relationships within the school are flexible, positive, and, for the most part, unencumbered by authority issues.

Regarding student participants, students were actively recruited regardless as to whether they were students of mine or of other teachers. Many of my students had made reading

comprehension gains during those years of instruction. This neither excluded them nor gave them preference. However, since this was not an action-research project but a qualitative dissertation, the sampling procedures, and no other concerns, determined participants.

Data Collection

Data from the student participants were collected through interviews, story chart artifacts created by each participant, and audio- and video-recorded observations of students' process and self-talk while reading and responding to short passages.

Interviews

Interviews are an integral part of all phenomenological research as "the goal is to describe things as they are, not as the participant (or the researcher) typically, and automatically, interprets things based on past experience" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 496). Participants need to have the opportunity to explore their experiences in at least one interview (Gall et al., 2007), and interviewing is considered a process (Creswell, 2013), not an event.

The information from these interviews addressed these research questions:

RQ1: What influences have impacted the lived experiences of these students as improving readers?

RQ2: What barriers to reading improvement existed for these students?

RQ3: What high school-related reading experiences, if any, hold meaning for adolescent readers?

RQ4: What characteristics are shared among adolescent readers who have experienced better-than-expected growth?

To these ends this study included one one-on-one semi-structured interview that springs from a set of structured questions which all participants addressed, but allowed the flexibility to

probe more deeply with open-ended follow-up questions (Gall et al., 2007). "This interview

approach has the advantage of providing reasonably standard data across respondents, but of

greater depth than can be obtained from a structured interview" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 246), which

allowed an exploration of shared characteristics of these readers in addition to preserving their

individual voices and experiences.

Participants completed the interview in a student-friendly space in the school building, a

location that was conducive to recording the interview (Creswell, 2013) as well as to creating an

equitable and comfortable rapport between the student and me. This space was not in a high-

traffic area, but it was a space that is designated for student use, which made it comfortable for

students. It was equipped with a door that shuts, preserving the participants' privacy. Each data

collection interaction spanned approximately 40 minutes.

The interview questions (see Appendix A) are grounded in the literature and in the

theoretical bases for this study, especially in Moustakas' (1994) delineation of the purposes and

methods of phenomenology. As Creswell (2013) explained, interviews in a phenomenology are

based on these "two broad, general questions: What have you experienced in terms of the

phenomenon? What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences

of the phenomenon?" (p. 81). The interview questions in this study were developed to mirror

these two ways of assisting the participants' exploration of their lived experiences of the

phenomenon of becoming better readers while in high school.

The first question type, "What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?"

(Creswell, 2013, p. 81), drove the following interview questions in this study:

1. How did you feel when you found out that you had become a much better reader in

high school?

2. What does the word *reading* mean to you?

4. Tell me about a time when you read something "hard" or challenging. (Prompt

questions: What were you reading? Why did you think it was "hard" or challenging?

How did you feel? Why do you think you responded that way? What do you do when

reading something that is difficult? Where did the idea for them come from?)

The second question type, "What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected

your experiences of the phenomenon?" (Creswell, 2013, p. 81), drove the remainder of the

interview questions in this study:

3. Why do you think you are becoming a better reader?

6. Why do you think most students don't continue to grow as readers as they get older?

What would you like to tell teachers who want to help these students become better

readers?

8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience with becoming a

better reader while in high school?

9. How would you like me to remember you as a reader?

Interview Question 5, "What are some of your high school experiences, if any, that you think

helped you become a better reader?" not only yielded insight into the contexts and situations that

influenced these readers' experience of the phenomenon but directly addressed Research

Question 3 (What high school-related reading experiences, if any, hold meaning for adolescent

readers?). Similarly, Interview Question 6 yielded contextual information for Research Question

1 as well as a direct response for Research Question 2, "What barriers to reading improvement

existed for these students?" All interview question responses were also analyzed through the lens

of Research Question 4, "What characteristics are shared among adolescent readers who have experienced better-than-expected growth?"

The questions in the interview itself were sequenced (as reflected in the numbering, above) from most open, to establish rapport and a cooperative relationship with the participants, to most specific (Gall et al., 2007), concluding with the participants' creation of their own conclusions, which is the heart of the phenomenological approach.

Artifact: Story Chart

The story chart artifact is a plot diagram with which all students at Placid High School are familiar since it is fully integrated throughout and beyond the freshman instructional year in English. It is a tool for tracking, ordering, and considering the elements of narrative, such as inciting incident, complications, crisis, climax, and resolution. Ricoeur (1984) highlighted the deeply human act of telling stories about ourselves and so stated that "we are justified in speaking of life as a story in its nascent state, and so of life as an *activity and a passion in search of a story*" (italics in original) (Ricoeur, 1984, p. 29).

Additionally, this was an appropriate task for this study because the participants are in a time in life as adolescents in which they have the cognitive ability to engage in autobiographical reasoning, which is "the process of self-reflective thinking or talking about the personal past that involves forming links between elements of one's life and the self in an attempt to relate one's personal past and present" (Habermas & Bluck, 2000, p. 749). The story chart was also an appropriate tool because it gave the participants the opportunity to recall stories which have "highly specific structures" (Habermas & Bluck, 2000, p. 749) that include "causal and thematic coherence" (p. 754) in addition to the narrative elements that children master and recreate from about age five such as "initiating problem and its resolution" (p. 752). Therefore, the story chart

artifact served as effective tool to guide students' telling of their story about becoming a better reader as they look back to "integrate their earlier and later selves" (Habermas & Bluck, 2000, p. 759).

The information from the story chart artifacts addressed these research questions:

RQ1: What influences have impacted the lived experiences of these students as improving readers?

RQ2: What barriers to reading improvement existed for these students?

RQ3: What high school-related reading experiences, if any, hold meaning for adolescent readers?

RQ4: What characteristics are shared among adolescent readers who have experienced better-than-expected growth?

The creation of the story chart was embedded as the second component of the session with each participant, and the prompts for this task are found in Interview Question 7 (see Appendix A). The following is the script that was loosely followed to prompt each participant's construction of the story diagram: "Tell me the story of how you became a better reader. Who are the characters in your story? What was the conflict? Inciting incident? When was the crisis? The climax? How does your story end? What do you think might happen next? Let's fill out a story chart together based on your narrative." Completion of the story chart spanned an average of approximately 10 minutes.

Observation of Reading Process through Recorded Videos

Observation is a rich companion to interviews as it allows the collection of complementary data from participants. Interviews, no matter how carefully constructed to be free from reflection and full only of lived experiences (van Manen, 2006), inevitably are "limited by

participants' knowledge, memory, and ability to convey information clearly and accurately, and [are] affected by how they wish to be perceived by outsiders" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 267). Observations, on the other hand, "allow researchers to formulate their own version of what is occurring and then check it with the participants" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 267). In addition, observations can allow me to formulate a "more complete description of the phenomenon" and to "[verify] the information obtained by other methods" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 276).

The information from observation of participants' reading process addressed this research question:

RQ4: What characteristics are shared among adolescent readers who have experienced better-than-expected growth?

The reading observation followed the interview and artifact components.

The participants' full and actual reading process was observed by utilizing recorded videos of students as they confronted a new text on the reading level that they attained in becoming a better reader (texts and prompts are included in Appendix C and Appendix D). Each student read a short passage of appropriate difficulty (considering all three elements of text complexity: Lexile level, literary complexity, and reader-task demands) (Fisher & Frey, 2013) based on their most recent and qualifying test data and reading experiences. In order to make observable what is essentially a series of internal behaviors that are involved in reading comprehension, the participants were asked to engage in self-talk (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978) and to allow their cursor movements to mirror their eye movements as they read (Traxler & Tooley, 2008). These two kinds of information recorded on the screencast of the reading observation were important since eye movements during reading "are assumed to

provide a window on difficulty or ease of understanding a text" (Hall, 1989, p. 159) and private speech is often a coping mechanism when readers encounter difficulties (Vygotsky, 1978).

My role as observer moved from participant-observer to observer-participant (Gall et al., 2007) because I interacted with participants regarding their reading processes by prompting them to reflect by asking questions after they read (see Appendix D). My absence during the reading observation and the delay between the reading experience and my analysis of the video recording of the experience could have served to lessen the observer effect (Gall et al., 2007).

Observations of the participants' reading were recorded using an online recording program, Screencast-O-Matic, which preserved the students' self-talk as well as their cursor movement over the computer screen as they read. The recorded observations were followed by the creation of thorough descriptive and reflective field notes (Gall et al., 2007). The reading observation typically lasted approximately 15 minutes.

The text for the reading observations met the guidelines outlined by Fisher and Frey (2013) as well as the Common Core State Standards for independent on-level reading: Lexile level, qualitative literary merit, and reader-task demands. One text was provided for each participant (see Appendix C) based on the participant's newest or highest level of performance as established by previous testing. The passage was a narrative-based exemplar text from the Common Core State Standards (see Appendix C), which identifies quality passages that meet all three criteria of appropriate text complexity. Three passages, spanning reading levels from middle school to upper high school, were originally included in the research plan. The middle school passage, from Frederick Douglass' 1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave, Written by Himself,* had a Flesch-Kincaid grade level score of 7.2. The ninth- and 10th-grade passage, from Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (1915), had a Flesch-Kincaid

grade level score of 10.6. The 11th and 12th grade passage, from "Part One: Southern Night" of Richard Wright's 1945 *Black Boy*, had a Flesch-Kincaid grade level score up to 10.0, a lower quantitative score due to his use of short lists and writers' names, balanced by a qualitative level of difficulty. All three passages included irony and historical social commentary, two of the many characteristics of challenging works with lasting literary merit – these are what students find worthy of the hard work that invokes interest for students, as Fisher and Frey's (2013) experience with adolescent readers suggested. All participants, however, were reading at a 10th grade or higher level, which indicated that the Wright passage was the most appropriate passage for these students. In addition, the fact that all participants read the same passage gave the researcher a consistent text on which to base observations about the reading process.

An informal discussion of the text with the researcher followed the reading observation in order to give the participants the opportunity to talk about their process of making meaning autonomously (Traxler & Tooley, 2008). The participants were encouraged to dive right in to discussing the text with the researcher, hence the first (and for some participants, the only) question: "What would you like to tell me or to talk about from your reading of the passage?" However, some guiding questions were planned, in the spirit of a semi-structured interview in which participants and researcher may move freely (Gall et al., 2007) if the participant was nervous, uncertain, or less able to approach the grade-level text independently than the data suggested. The questions to guide discussion moved from questioning to details to literary analysis to deeper understanding, just as readers move authentically to comprehension. The questions are listed below with the supporting reference from seminal reading comprehension research.

Reciprocal Teaching Protocol (Apthorp & Clark, 2007; Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, Goldman, 2012; Santa, 2006)

1. What questions would you like to ask about this passage? (Clarify stage)

2. Retell the passage in your own words. (Summarize stage)

Close Reading Protocol (Fisher & Frey, 2013)

3. What do you think is the most important or strangest detail in the passage? What do you make of it?

4. What did you notice that might be ironic in this passage? Tell me about it.

Chall's Reading Scheme, Stage 5

5. Tell me about an experience you have had that is similar to what happened to the narrator's/character's experience. Do you agree with the author's point?

Metacognition (Ness, 2008)

The reflective questions at the end of the observation-based semi-structured interview addressed the growing metacognitive needs of students who are improving as readers (Ness, 2008). This line of inquiry, embedded in Question 6, included two sequenced questions to encourage students to think back on the reading: "How was reading with me today like anything (or nothing) you have done before in school? What was similar and different?" Additionally, these reflective questions gave the participants the opportunity to continue growing as readers even as they contributed to the body of knowledge about reading improvement.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed utilizing processes and procedures from phenomenological research appropriate to the data collection type which included Hycner's reductionist framework for the interviews and for the artifact and story chart discussion, hermeneutic analysis for the story chart,

and visual charting for the self-recorded reading videos. As an inexperienced researcher, I desired a more structured process for analysis of interviews and story chart discussions while still honoring the nature of qualitative inquiry. Hycner's 15-step reductionist framework based on the concept of Husserl is an apt fit for interview analysis, especially for "researchers who have not had enough philosophical background to being to even know what 'being true to the phenomenon' means in relation to concrete research methods" (Hycner, 1985, p. 280). This "reduction" is not counter to the openness of the phenomenology but instead allows the researcher to "elicit units of general meaning" (Hycner, 1985, p. 280) critical to this kind of analysis.

First, transcriptions from recordings of interviews (preserved on the hard drive on the researcher's computer and backed up on Vocaroo, a free online recorder) were completed to preserve both the students' literal words as well as their "non-verbal or para-linguistic expressions" (Hycner, 1985, p. 280). These transcriptions were complemented by a three-column field notes format, intentionally leaving space for notes about units of meaning on further reflection with the transcriptions. The interview recordings and transcripts were approached through a lens as free as possible from my own perspective by bracketing presuppositions, both the ones I was aware of and the ones not yet explored, through conversations with my colleagues, since my goal was "to enter into the world of the unique individual who was interviewed" (Hycner, 1985, p. 281). Then the recordings were heard and the transcriptions reread at least two more times while noting my reflections in a journal to get a sense of the individual student's responses as whole. Units of general meaning were delineated to consider groups of words spoken by the students that seemed to convey individual ideas, not with respect to the research questions but only to their intent.

In Hycner's fifth step, the research questions were used for the first time in this process to delineate the units of meaning from the transcripts relevant to my inquiry. Then my categorization of these units of meaning were reviewed by "critical friend[s]" (Costa & Kallick, 1993) to ensure that my perspective and biases were removed as much as possible in the understanding of units of meaning decontextualized from the wholeness of the interview. Next, redundancies were removed after careful consideration of not only literal meaning but also the tone and intent of the speaker's words, and then a list of "non-redundant units of relevant meaning" (Hycner, 1985, p. 287) was created to cluster relevant units of meaning free from my own predispositions. These clusters then allowed me to explore themes that emerged from the interview analysis completed so far in the process. Next a summary was written for each interview, including the themes that emerged, then the participants were invited to complete a member-check, and any contributions were utilized to modify the summary and themes. After these steps for all the interviews had been completed, both general themes and themes unique to individuals were sought, then the themes were recontextualized through connecting them to specifics from within the transcripts. Last, a composite summary, similar to a textural-structural description (Creswell, 2013) that includes both general and individual themes was created.

To analyze the participants' story charts, a hermeneutical approach (van Manen, 2006) was also utilized. A transcription of the voice recording of each participant's work was created to assist in the crafting of the story of becoming a better reader which accompanied each plot diagram. Sticky notes on the individual story charts indicated significant statements about the story made during the telling of the story, which shed more light on the events that the student chose to include on the chart. Statements from the transcribed voice recording of causal coherence and thematic coherence (Habermas & Bluck, 2000) were attached, also using Sticky

notes to explore common and different influences, barriers, high-school-related experiences, and characteristics among these readers. Then, a meta-narrative story chart that included the canonical story elements (such as complications and resolution) (McAdams, 2008) was created to study the language that the participants chose to use, and the transcriptions and voice recordings were studied again, in a single session, in order to be attentive to all aspects of the data collection, and any new observations were added to the composite story chart. Last, the story charts were synthesized into a composite chart of the narrative structure, including common themes, influences, barriers, experiences, and characteristics. See Appendix B for a composite narrative and plot diagram.

A visual analysis procedure for tracking curser patterns and self-talk similar to the procedures used by Traxler and Tooley (2008) were utilized to analyze the video- and audio-recorded observations of students' reading. Two dimensions were superimposed on a chart – through space as the physical cursor moves on the screen and through time in relation to the time stamp and the students' self-talk. The resulting tracking charts were printed out on enlarged transparencies to overlay participants' data to discover any similarities or differences among the reading processes of these improving readers, which in turn led to insights about the shared characteristics of these readers and their reading processes. Additionally, any references that students made to reading comprehension interventions or strategies that surfaced in the self-talk were tracked. For the audio recording of the discussion component of the reading observation, Hycner's (1985) steps were utilized to explore the participants' responses.

Data across the three data collections were synthesized by sharing and reflecting with a "critical friend" (Costa & Kallick, 1993) and journaling as the study progressed. More specifically, systematic data analysis assisted in the discovery of significant theme clusters and

units of meaning, as did making tables to clarify the patterns of meaning across the data and creating a concluding description of the essence of the experience for the adolescents who have experienced this phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). However, creatively and insightfully synthesizing these many data while fully addressing the research questions invited creation of an additional document: a composite personal narrative told in the voice of these students addressing teachers who desire to better reach and assist them.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of my study was established through careful consideration of credibility, dependability and confirmability, and transferability.

Credibility

Credibility was established through three strategies: by examining my own research skills and honing them as the study progressed, by confirming that my transcripts and analyses reflected both my participants' perceptions and my own, separating them in my field notes and journal as they arose since my "reactions to events [will be] a legitimate part of the study and worthy of reporting" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 276), and by allowing my participants' voices to be heard. Since my overall focus was to reliably reflect my participants' lived experiences, the peer debriefing process (Creswell, 2013) was important. A colleague who is as passionate as I about student reading improvement and my local committee member served in the role of "devil's advocate" suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) (as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 251). These trusted colleagues assisted me in establishing credibility by "asking hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations; and [provide] [me] with the opportunity for catharsis by sympathetically listening to [my] feelings" (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). As per Creswell (2013), I kept written journal entries of our sessions. In addition, member checking (Creswell, 2013) was invited after each data collection. Any participant who was willing and able to review the study at its conclusion was also invited to do

so. Finally, in the writing of the study I strove to use an "honest and straightforward . . . reporting style in order to achieve verisimilitude" (Gall et al., 2013) to capture as vividly as possible the participants' lived experiences in the language and style of the study, thereby persuading its readers that these experiences and characteristics are worth studying to consider their implications for improvement of practice.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability**,** which is a way to understand the researcher's desire to create as much stability as possible in the discoveries, was established through the design of this study. The design strove to reflect "clear, meaningful links between research questions, raw data, and the findings" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 474), which positively affected dependability. Schwandt (2007) suggested that dependability is best established by documentation of the research process, so an audit trail (Gall et al., 2007) which includes a full and accurate record of research, reflections, interactions, and processes throughout the study, was available on demand.

Confirmability, meaning that there is a clear and meaningful relationship between the information gathered from the participants and the patterns and meanings that were synthesized, was attained through several methods. First, clarifying my biases as a researcher (Creswell, 2013) regarding the phenomenon and my role as a researcher allowed me and the readers of this study to separate my responses from the experiences of the participants, thereby building its confirmability. In addition, the use of both physical and computer aids in coding (the "Search" tool on Microsoft Word in addition to printouts, highlighters, markers, and Sticky* notes) was integrated throughout the process. Additionally, including a wide range of participants in my study allowed the development of a consistent understanding of the phenomenon across the multiplicity of experiences.

Transferability

Transferability was addressed by providing "rich, thick descriptions" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252) of context, setting, and content of the interviews, reading observations, and story chart artifacts. This type of description, which includes much detail in description and analysis (Creswell, 2013), "allows readers . . . to determine whether the findings can be transferred" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252) when characteristics are shared between groups of participants. Most importantly, triangulation of data (Creswell, 2013) was utilized to build transferability, as this study included three different data sources – interviews, observations, and an artifact – in addition to being based upon multiple theoretical and conceptual lenses.

Ethical Considerations

The most significant ethical considerations were the potential power imbalance (Creswell, 2013) between the researcher, a classroom teacher at Placid High School, and the participants, who were high school students at the same school. "Respect [for] potential power imbalances" (Creswell, 2013, p. 58) drove most of the research considerations of this study, which also demanded full discussion regarding the study to the participants' satisfaction before commencing. This respect also required that the researcher "avoid asking leading questions [and] withhold sharing personal impressions" (Creswell, 2013, p. 58) during data collection.

The ethical consideration of confidentiality (Gall et al., 2007) was addressed by using pseudonyms, chosen by students when they had a preference; by keeping all data and documents in a locked room with no windows (or covered if the room is in use) and sensitive data (such as the key linking names to pseudonyms and artifacts as well as all test data from the participant selection process) in a locked file cabinet or computer file; and by attaining consent from all participants and their guardians or parents. The consideration of privacy was addressed by

limiting the spaces in which students participate in all research activities to student-friendly spaces on campus, where no other students were able to identify who is participating in the study.

Reciprocity (Creswell, 2013), or "giving back to the participants for their time and efforts" (Creswell, 2013, p. 55), was addressed by giving students snacks during interviews as well as certificates of participation that the students could use for their Senior Project/Student-Led Conferences, college resume verification, or college and job applications.

Summary

This phenomenological study explored the four research questions through interviews, story charts, and reading observations in order to examine the lived experiences of high school students who made greater-than-expected gains in reading comprehension. The research questions were as follows:

RQ1: What influences have impacted the lived experiences of these students as improving readers?

RQ2: What barriers to reading improvement existed for these students?

RQ3: What high school-related reading experiences, if any, hold meaning for adolescent readers?

RQ4: What characteristics are shared among adolescent readers who have experienced better-than-expected growth?

The 12 participants were discovered at Placid High School (pseudonym) through criterion, snowball, purposive, and maximal sampling. Data was collected through interviews, story charts, and reading observations, and Hycner's reductionist method was applied to find units of meaning in the students' expressions. A hermeneutical analytical approach was chosen to invite revelation

and exploration of meaning in the participants' story charts, and visual overlay techniques assisted the researcher in determining patterns in the participants' reading processes. Credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability were established, and all ethical considerations were abided by throughout the research process so that the students' stories maintain the power to impact educators' perceptions of how students become better readers.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the experience of improvement in reading comprehension for 12 adolescent readers who have made gains greater than what might be predicted based on previous growth in reading comprehension measures. Chapter Four presents profiles of the participants, including pertinent demographic data, and explains criterion measures for their inclusion in the study. Through analysis of data collected from interviews, story charts, and reading observations, answers to the four research questions are presented. The research questions are as follows: What influences have impacted the lived experiences of these improving readers? What barriers to reading improvement existed for these students? What school-related reading experiences, if any, hold meaning for these readers? What characteristics are shared among adolescent readers who have experienced better-than-expected growth? Additionally, this chapter presents the four themes that emerged from the data analysis supported by inclusion of the voices of the participants and the essence of their stories. This chapter concludes with a summary.

Participants

Twelve adolescents who made ambitious gains as readers during high school participated in this study. All profiles will include each participant's age and current grade in school, criterion measures for which the student was selected for the study, pertinent demographic information to showcase purposive and maximal sampling criteria, and a general overview of reading attitudes and experiences as stated in the data collection process. The table below outlines the demographic information.

Table 2

Demographics of Participants

Name	Age	Grade	Gender	Ethnicity
Aaliyah	15	10th	Female	African-American
Aidan	18	12th	Male	African-American
Arianna	18	12th	Female	African-American
Brianna	18	11th	Female	Caucasian
Devontay	15	10th	Male	African-American
Jairo	17	12th	Male	Hispanic
Jennifer	17	12th	Female	Caucasian
Kimberly	17	12th	Female	Caucasian
Molly	17	12th	Female	Caucasian
NaTalia	17	11th	Female	Caucasian
Phionex	17	12th	Male	Asian
Sally	18	12th	Female	Caucasian

Note. Data for table was taken directly from students and from school database before interview.

Aaliyah

Aaliyah, a 15-year-old sophomore at Placid High School, showed ambitious gains as a reader during this current school year as reflected in her Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) scores. Her fall testing score was 1628, and her mid-term score reflected an increase of 360 points to 1988, greatly exceeding even the ambitious growth target of $1628 + 123$ ($M = 60 + SD = 63$) $= 1641$. These scores are especially significant as the last set of reading comprehension scores from eighth grade showed a significant decline from her fall score in the 97th percentile (1465) to the 87th percentile (1303) in the spring of that same school year. Maintaining a 3.4 GPA and involved in school sports and clubs, she is enrolled in honors, Advanced Placement, and gifted and talented academic coursework, although her academic strength areas are English language arts and science. Additionally, Aaliyah was selected as study participant due to her

enthusiasm for true learning as shared by her drama instructor, her interest following her older sister's participation in the study, and the fact that demographically she represents an under-represented population in the advanced academic programs. Her father is of the Ibo tribe in Nigeria and is a college professor and athletic coach, and her mother is an American Caucasian, but Aaliyah fully identifies as African-American and has taken on a leadership role in the school's Black history, student-led presentations throughout high school. The first word that Aaliyah ever read was *kangaroo*, and she said that she would like to be remembered as "a reader who was not afraid to read."

Aidan

Aidan, an 18-year-old senior who identifies his ethnicity or race as black or African-American, is currently maintaining a 3.6 GPA while balancing a very full schedule of student leadership responsibilities, musical ensembles, two Advanced Placement classes, and a dual-credit class for future educators. Aidan met the criterion for inclusion in this study due to his increased critical reading scores from his junior-year PSAT in October 2014, on which he scored a 57 (78th percentile), to the ACT critical reading taken in April 2015 on which he scored a 33 (98th percentile). Clearly, this growth meets the criteria of "ambitious," but to further elucidate: his junior-year PSAT correlates to approximately a 570 SAT score in a typical senior year, or an ACT score of 25, according to the ACT-SAT Concordance (2008) and Score Change from PSAT/NMSQT to SAT (2008), but Aidan's actual performance greatly exceeded this expectation: approximately only 2% of students make that kind of gain from that baseline score. Aidan's perspective as an African-American male who has both thrived and survived setbacks in high school suggested that he would be a strong participant, stretching the data in a purposive and maximal sample. As a reader, Aidan referenced the vernacular of music to explore his

experiences as a reader, using words such as "resonance" and tracing conductor's patterns in the air when he spoke.

Arianna

Arianna, Aaliyah's sister who is as different as "apples and oranges," is an 18-year-old senior enrolled in a full schedule of Advanced Placement classes with a 3.96 GPA. Her ambitious gains as a reader were reflected in an increase in reading comprehension scores from her junior-year PSAT administered in October 2014, on which she scored a 63 (91st percentile), to her SAT reading comprehension assessment later that same academic year in April 2015, on which she scored a 31 (approximately concordant with a 69 on the PSAT or a 690 on the SAT) (ACT-SAT Concordance: A Tool for Comparing, 2008). These scores reflect ambitious gains in that most students' junior-year PSAT scores are highly correlated to their senior-year SAT according to Score Change from PSAT/NMSQT to SAT (2008) published by the College Board. Using these two instruments, Arianna's predicted ACT score would have been a 28 a year after taking the PSAT, but her actual score, only six months after taking the PSAT, was a 31 – a gain that only the top 5% of juniors attain in a full school year. Additionally, Arianna was selected for participation due to her interest in reading and research and her wide-ranging interests outside of school, including soccer and community service. She is taking a full schedule of Advanced Placement classes this year, and she self-identifies as black or African-American. For her senior project, she completed an independent study on the use of the "N" word in youth culture.

Brianna

Brianna, an 18-year-old junior who is Caucasian, has a GPA of 2.1 and has made strong progress recovering academically after switching schools several times throughout her education. Her middle school academic transcript features enrichment courses in English, social studies,

math, science, and reading. At the beginning of ninth grade, she was moved from an extra-assistance section of English I to a more advanced section based on the progress she had made during the first few weeks of school, and she has continued to improve in her overall academic performance. An interesting aspect of her reading comprehension data history is her strong potential as reflected in her very first MAP administration: her Lexile level was shown to be 772 in third grade, a percentile ranking of 91. She never again attained that percentile performance. Brianna was invited to participate in this study due to her increased reading comprehension scores as evidenced in her SRI scores from the first few weeks of her freshman year: she exited middle school with a MAP Lexile score of 1015, or the 52nd percentile, which was approximately her average percentile performance (53rd percentile during middle school). However, after just a few weeks of high school instruction, Brianna scored an 1195 Lexile level on the MAP test (78th percentile), and she continued that momentum into the midyear testing administration with a score that reflects continued improvement: 1231, or 80th percentile performance. Brianna not only carries a full academic load to prepare her for college, but is also currently between jobs, having recently left a pizza restaurant because she had to work too many closing shifts, which was interfering with her schoolwork. She is actively pursuing another job at a fast food restaurant, but she still finds time to go to the library to find new books.

Devontay

Devontay, a 15-year-old tenth-grader who has a 1.6 GPA, is African-American and is currently enrolled in both college preparatory and career-and-technology courses of study. When he was in middle school, he received a credit for the first year of high school English, but he also was enrolled in several enrichment courses. Devontay was invited to be a participant in this study based on his improvement in reading comprehension as evidenced in his SRI scores. His fall

Lexile level was measured at 1025, and his mid-year SRI score was a 1200, which exceeds the ambitious-gain level of 1025 + 81 M + 82 SD = 1188. Historically, Devontay's reading comprehension as measured on the MAP test has shown a steady pattern of improvement within each school year, but with a significant dip in the fall testing administrations, perhaps reflecting "summer slump." A significant exception to this pattern of growth occurred in his seventh-grade MAP scores, which reflected a loss of almost 300 Lexile points over the school year, moving from the 79th percentile to the 32nd percentile. Additionally, he indicated an initial curiosity and interest when approached about participating, even though his interview was delayed by an out-of-school suspension, and his questions regarding the research process suggested that he could add a rich perspective to the data collection.

Jairo

Jairo, a 17-year-old senior whose ethnicity is listed as white and Hispanic in the student information database but self-identifies as Hispanic, maintains a 3.37 GPA while taking a wide-ranging and challenging course load, including six Advanced Placement classes and two business applications classes. Outside of school, Jairo participates in the Young Entrepreneurs of America organization and is interested in the impact that creativity can have in the business world. Jairo's ambitious reading improvement was achieved during his junior year: his critical reading scores increased from 61 (88th percentile) on the October 2014 PSAT to 34 (approximately 98th percentile) on the April 2015 ACT. Interestingly, his reading progress seems to have been stagnant until this point in time as his MAP scores were relatively flat, ranging from 85th scaled percentile to 90th scaled percentile since 2010, and he scored a 90% on his freshman year end-of-course examination in English I, which is predominantly reading comprehension with some analysis of text features. Jairo said that he would like to be

remembered "as a good reader," and he says he thinks he has gotten better because he learned more about how reading tests work.

Jennifer

Jennifer, a 17-year-old Caucasian senior with a 4.0 GPA, is currently enrolled in six Advanced Placement classes. She is considered both academically and artistically gifted. She was identified as a potential participant for this study due to her ambitious gains as a reader from her PSAT Critical Reading score in October of her junior year (60, or 86th percentile) to her ACT Critical Reading score in April of the same school year (32, or approximately 95th percentile). Moreover, Jennifer was a strong potential participant due to her reflectivity and her quiet reserve, both qualities that Dewey (1910) and Chall (1983) suggested support reading growth. Jennifer enjoys books that challenge her perceptions; she says that she enjoys "books that make you believe that maybe the protagonist is the crazy one, but then you realize it might not be him who's the crazy person," and she referred to "classic lit" seven times during her interview. She is intrigued by books, both fiction and nonfiction, that reveal "true character to be reflected in the worst of times."

Kimberly

Kimberly, a 17-year-old Caucasian senior who is maintaining a 2.5 GPA, has struggled to have the opportunity to take advanced coursework in order to challenge herself. She met the criteria to be included in this study through her increased reading comprehension scores from her PSAT critical reading score of 56 (77th percentile) on the October 2014 test administration to an ACT critical reading score of 29 (86th percentile). To clarify, her PSAT score would have predicted a correlated SAT score in the fall of her senior year of approximately 560, but her ACT score just six months later was equivalent to approximately a 650 on the SAT, indicating an

improvement that less than 11% of high school seniors attain. Additionally, once Kimberly was made aware of her better-than-expected gains in reading comprehension, she was enthusiastic about participating in the study, suggesting that she would be able to provide articulate and insightful comments about her own reading improvement as well as her perspective as a student whose hard work does not always pay off with increased grades. Kimberly says that as a reader, she works hard to plumb the depths of theme, admitting that sometimes the themes she sees "have no real correlation to the story, but that's kind of how I read."

Molly

Molly, a 17-year-old senior who is Caucasian, maintains a 3.3 GPA with a mixed schedule of Advanced Placement and honors classes. She is a trained peer mediator and a dedicated thespian, both outlets that have been indispensable for her as she dealt with the loss of her father a few years ago. As a reader, Molly made ambitious gains during her junior year as evidenced by an impressive percentile increase from her October 2014 PSAT critical reading score of 45 (42nd percentile) to her April 2015 ACT critical reading score of 22 (61st percentile). She can be found "hanging out" on Tumblr, a social media tool with a strong visual component that she says "is just the place I like to be to read things."

NaTalia

NaTalia, a 17-year-old Caucasian junior, was homeschooled during her elementary years and has received Learning Strategies support since middle school, but she has transitioned into intermittent services. She is maintaining a 3.0 GPA while taking a varied academic schedule; she began her high school English instruction in the least advanced level of instruction and has continued to progress in both academics, including chemistry and algebra, and career-and-technology courses. Her reading comprehension testing history is dynamic and lacks a pattern of

persistent growth: her percentile scores as measured on the MAP test averaged about 53rd percentile prior to high school, which indicates that she was reading close to grade-level. She began her freshman year with a Lexile percentile score at the 29th percentile level (Lexile = 835), but by midyear her scores had risen to a 1087, or 63rd percentile. These scores meet the definition of ambitious growth, which would have been satisfied with an end-of-year score of 1087 (starting score of 835 + 120 M + 132 SD = 1087), a score that she attained midyear. Additionally, she has maintained her reading improvement momentum this year as evidenced by her first PSAT, a test on which she achieved a score of 45, or a percentile score of 60th percentile among college-bound juniors. She enjoys her welding class, as she sees this skill as a way to finance her higher education, and she is fascinated by the writings of Charles Darwin.

Phionex

Phionex, 17 and a senior of Asian (Indian, more specifically) ethnicity, has a 3.8 GPA and has participated in advanced academic studies, including a competitive STEM summer program at Yale University. He became homeless for a period of time this school year due to a family dispute, but he continued to effectively balance a full schedule of Advanced Placement and dual-credit classes, primarily focusing on math, science, and logic classes. Phionex's ambitious reading gains were evidenced from his junior-year PSAT in October 2014 (63, or 91st percentile, on Critical Reading) to his ACT in April 2015 (32, or approximately 98thth percentile, on Critical Reading as represented on National Distributions of Cumulative Percents for ACT Test Scores, 2015). Phionex's self-perceived "outsider" perspective – shaped by his experiences as a second-language speaker, as an immigrant from Canada, as a child born to parents who came from India to make a better life, and his drive to grow outside of his strength areas – suggest that he could make a significant contribution to my understanding of the

phenomenon of reading improvement. When asked how he would like to be remembered as a reader, Phionex said, "I'm the guy who'd probably read any and every story about swords."

Sally

Sally, an 18-year-old Caucasian senior with a 3.6 GPA, had missed more than 25 days during the school year prior to her participation due to chronic headaches – and an impromptu trip to be on the TV show *Tosh.O* after a video of her falling from a banister on a cruise ship went viral (her "Redemption" video has gotten more than 4.8 million views). Sally was identified as a potential participant in this study due to the reading gains that she made as reflected in her score increase from her junior-year PSAT in October 2014 (critical reading score of 60, or 86th percentile) to her ACT score from April 2015 (critical reading score of 35, or 99th percentile). Her inclusion in this study also helped me utilize purposive sampling, as she could offer an articulate and enthusiastic perspective on reading improvement – she was so stunned by her own growth that she returned to her English teacher to express her appreciation. Sally is currently enrolled in dual-credit, honors, and Advanced Placement courses. She would like to be remembered as a reader who was "willing."

Results

The section below presents the results from analysis of the three data collections within the semi-structured interview format, first regarding the research questions, then regarding themes that emerged. Following Hycner's protocol, units of meaning derived from relevant portions of the interview, story chart artifact, and reading observation were isolated and categorized after being decontextualized from the transcripts. Redundancies were removed and a list of "non-redundant units of relevant meaning" (Hycner, 1985, p. 287) regarding each research

question was generated. Participant voices are offered as representative examples that support the patterns which emerged through the research questions.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1, "What influences have impacted the lived experiences of these improving readers?" was examined as a composite of Creswell's two question types regarding the phenomenology: "What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?" (Creswell, 2013, p. 81) and "What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?" (Creswell, 2013, p. 81). The first question type of Creswell's clarification of the phenomenological process, "What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?" (Creswell, 2013, p. 81), was addressed in Interview Questions 1, 2, and 4, as well as in the story chart artifact. This series of interactions with the researcher allowed the participants to explore many facets of their reactions, the meaning of *reading* and therefore the central aspect of their experience, the extent of their new skills, and the impact of their improvement on their reading trajectory.

Interview Question 1, "How did you feel when you found out that you had become a better reader while you were in high school?" invited students to consider the emotional impact of the experience by choosing a word that captured their response. The researcher developed four units of relevant meaning from analyzing their responses. These included the following: proud, surprised, neutral or lack of realization, and inferiority. Interview Question 2 asked them to define the phenomenon in their own words in responses to the researcher's question, "What does reading mean to you?" Overall, the participants struggled to define the term and reached in many areas of their lived experiences to create a response. Only one participant mentioned that reading was a skill, only four made any mention of reading as a process or as a way of processing

information, and three others mentioned than reading was more than decoding or the performance of reading aloud. The majority of the responses, when coded and analyzed, revealed an understanding of reading not as a skill or process, but something that one immerses oneself in, something that is an extension of self, something that brings order out of disorder.

Interview Question 4, "Tell me about a time when you read something hard or challenging," also addressed Creswell's (2013) first question, "What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?" in that it asks participants to explore a crisis point in their reading improvement or an initial application of new skills. The participants shared what they read that was challenging, what made the text challenging, how they felt while they were reading, techniques that they used to persevere and comprehend, and the source of those techniques. The texts and the participants' affective experiences were analyzed through the lens of Research Question 1.

First, data analysis delineating categories of units of meaning revealed two sources of texts that the participants chose to discuss as "hard" or challenging: self selected and teacher assigned. NaTalia mentioned both self-selected and teacher-assigned texts, and eight participants – including Devontay, Aidan, Aaliyah, Molly, Sally, Brianna, Arianna, and NaTalia – identified a challenging book as one assigned by a teacher while in high school. These texts included *The Great Gatsby, The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *Antigone*, *Julius Caesar, Macbeth, Lord of the Flies, The Canterbury Tales*, anything by Shakespeare, and poetry, especially poetry from earlier eras. Five participants self-selected the text that they identified as challenging.

Participants were also invited to share their affective experiences when they were reading these challenging texts. Analysis of the units of meaning led to the discovery of three categories

of significant statements: uneasiness, confusion, and confidence. Few participants used explicit emotional vocabulary, and one participant's response was included in two of the categories. Four participants' responses implied that they had experienced confusion while they were reading, although no participant used either the word *confusion* or a synonym. Aidan said that "there was a lot going on" that he had to "untangle" because the book "switched" a lot and was "kind of broken." However, Arianna's perception of the challenging level of the book was mitigated by her confidence, an affective experience which seven of the participants shared.

The story chart artifact also gave participants the opportunity to share what they had experienced regarding the phenomenon of becoming a better reader. Analysis of units of meaning yielded two ways of exploring what they had experienced as improving readers during high school: a shifting sense of identity as individuals and as members of peer groups, and an expanding idea of the nature of reading. First, for Brianna, who chose to tell her reading story in third person ("There once was this girl"), improvement occurred when she was alone and scared at the beginning of her freshman year: "She felt like the world was closing in on her because she didn't have any friends, so instead of making friends, she picked up books and started reading." This fragmentation of personal identity was similar with Phionex's story of reading new books that "broke the barrier and opened me to look at *those* books as well," but it contrasted sharply with Sally's experience, which was marked by smoothness and ease into the next phase of her reading identity. When speaking about her experience improving as a reader, she said, "I don't think I even knew how [she improved], I just think it just kind of happened." For these participants, becoming a better reader has occurred in relational contexts, both drawing together and pushing apart, and has shifted their understanding not only of their own identity but of the essence of their individual concept of *reading*.

To continue addressing Research Question 1 (What influences have impacted the lived experiences of these students as improving readers?), Creswell's (2013) second question type was used to explore responses to Interview Questions 3, 6, 8, and 9 as well as the story chart artifact when applicable. More specifically, this section will explore participants' understanding of "What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?" (Creswell, 2013, p. 81). This series of interactions with the researcher allowed the participants to explore their perceptions about how they have made these ambitious gains and their perceptions about why other students may not be making these sorts of improvement.

Interview Question 3, "Why do you think you are becoming a better reader?" invited students to formulate a theory about causes and contexts of their own improvement. Analysis of the units of meaning gleaned from significant statements revealed six categories of student perceptions regarding why they are making ambitious gains as readers: effort and/ or competitiveness of readers, nurture and skill of teachers, increasing complexity of texts, climate of reading communities, increased frequency and quantity of reading, and individual maturation of readers. All participants explored multiple causes for their improvement, averaging three each. Three participants – Aaliyah, Sally, and Brianna – credited part of their growth to their own effort. Five participants, however, mentioned teachers as important to their growth as readers.

Being exposed to or being required to read texts of increasing difficulty was mentioned by five participants as influential on their growth. For example, Jennifer has consciously self-selected more sophisticated reading material, stating, "On my own I have been trying to read more classic literature." Aidan, NaTalia, and Jairo have been assigned increasingly complex texts that are more challenging than what they might choose on their own. Jairo clarified that

"we're reading things I've never thought about reading before, would never have thought to read, things from centuries ago basically, or even longer."

The climate of the community in which reading occurs or is connected was also expressed as influential on these improving readers. Six participants mentioned this aspect as least once and several mentioned it several times in response to Interview Question 3. For Aaliyah, Phionex, and Jennifer, family was the context that they chose to mention as influential, and Aidan, Molly, and Sally focused on school-based communities.

Increased frequency and quantity of reading also emerged as a strong category from analysis of the units of meaning during the data analysis phase, and eight participants accounted for their dramatic improvement by referring to their individual maturation. Aidan said he was improving because "you kind of have to grow up a little bit." For Arianna, this includes an expansion of her point of view: she is reading better because "I want to look at the bigger picture or on a smaller scale." There was one participant, Devontay, who indicated that his improvement as a reader has sprung from the fact that "I actually read things I *like* to read now, I don't just go and pick up a book," indicating that greater self-awareness and sense of empowerment over book choice had a positive impact on his reading skill.

To continue examining the data related to the second part of Research Question 1 ("What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experience of the phenomenon?"), I sought units of general meaning that reflected groups of significant statements of responses to Interview Question 6. This question contained two parts that were designed to implicitly reveal a set of influences that the participant might not explicitly acknowledge: "Why do you think most students don't continue to grow as readers as they get older? What would you like to tell teachers who want to help these students become better readers?" Together, these

questions invited participants to turn the tables a bit and to consider in reverse, but in relation to

their own influences, the situation of other adolescents. All participants did indeed answer this

question with reference to their own experiences: Aidan said, "That's just what I do," Aaliyah

referred to her Nigerian background, Molly spoke from her negative experiences with a reading

incentive program, Brianna believed her value of reading should be a shared belief, NaTalia

based her answer on "what I have learned, and I have found out that a few other people learn this

way, too," Jairo referenced what he "know[s] for myself," Jennifer mentioned barriers and

techniques from other parts of her interview, Phionex identified himself with the adolescent need

to "spend time with their friends" (although he maintained a strong third-person point of view),

With this basis established, then several categories of meaning emerged as the statements

of general meaning were analyzed (the participants' answers to both questions were analyzed

separately and together to develop a cohesive view of which statements addressed this part of the

research question), and the responses to this question gleaned many "contexts or situations [that]

... affected their experience of the phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 81). Two categories of

contexts pertinent to this research question emerged from analysis of the data: personal contexts

and the larger social and cultural context. All participant responses reflected multiple contexts.

First, personal contexts regarding the analysis of this data include self-knowledge and

motivation, tastes, personal traits and characteristics, and tensions between reading and other

aspects of life. Some of the personal contexts or characteristics that were identified with strength

were persistence paired with curiosity, wide-ranging and easily engaged interests, and a desire

for self-improvement.

These readers also reported wide-ranging and easily engaged interests as part of their

personal context as improving readers. Phionex said that other readers might "read technical

books and they just need their own field, like welding, I would say," which, compounded with the idea of flexible interests that flow through his other responses, suggests that he sees this as an important personal context.

The responses also that suggested some restrictions that can be attached to personal contexts were expressed by Molly, Sally, Phionex, and Kimberly. Molly identified stress resulting from "being forced" to read and to participate in high-stakes reading incentive programs as a barrier to reading improvement and enjoyment. Phionex saw students' self-perception as a potential restriction to growth: "Either they figure they don't need it [to improve at reading] any more, or they think, 'Oh, I'm at a decent level, I don't think I need it anymore.'" Sally acknowledged the power of personal motivation, but she saw this as a potential limiting factor as well, stating, "You can only be as motivated as you want to be."

This insight is a powerful connection to the last category of meaning for these interview questions: the larger social and cultural contexts in which these students live and grow. Three subcategories emerged when the interview data was analyzed, including the pressure to achieve, the impact of family, and the influence of peer relationships.

Another context that shaped the participants' experience of the phenomenon in response to Interview Question 6 was relationships, including family and peers. NaTalia said that she felt like many students who are not progressing "don't read at home," and Aaliyah reflected on the influence of her father, whose traditional Nigerian attitudes towards learning contrast sharply to what she perceives as attitudes of American parents. Peers were also referenced as an important component of social context by four participants as they responded to these interview questions. Both Sally and NaTalia acknowledged the power of peer groups to shape identity but from contrasting points of view. Sally, who discussed how being in upper-level classes had a positive

impact on her experience, said, "You will fit into your surroundings," and NaTalia, who has struggled to achieve in lower-level classes characterized by behavior problems, said, "Yeah, sometimes it's the influences you're around, like the popular kids who think that being smart is horrible – it's not."

Interview Question 8, "Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience with becoming a better reader while in high school?," and Interview Question 9, "How would you like me to remember you as a reader?," gave participants the opportunity to share what they believed to be significant even if there was no convergent interview goal. Analysis of significant statements yielded several units of general meaning pertinent to Research Question 1, "What influences have impacted the lived experiences of these students as improving readers?" specifically external situations and internal contexts that have affected their experiences as improving readers. The category of external situations included general academic improvement and school-related experiences. The category of internal contexts included agency in choosing texts, awareness of the impact of personal effort and choice, acknowledgement of the importance of flexible thinking (barriers and shifts), and confidence and courage.

Data collected from the story chart artifact regarding the contexts and situations around the experience of the phenomenon included two significant categories of statements: family contexts and peer relationships. Three participants mentioned family members when sharing their story chart artifact. For both Jennifer and Phionex, sharing books with family members strengthened strained bonds: Jennifer's father had to move to Canada for work and "the one things that really connects us is literature" that "has brought us even closer though he moved away," and Phionex's relationship with his father has been increasingly difficult as he has marched toward adulthood, but he said, "my dad recommends me books" that stretch him as a

reader and connect them with each other. For Arianna, it was a family member's personal stories that contextualized *The Bell Jar* (the reading experience that she identified as her crisis and turning point), and she "appreciated that I could hear like some truthful elements of the time period from someone who had experienced it."

While these readers included family in many of the plot points in their story chart artifact, several other participants expressed a connection between books and friends. Molly and her friends exchange young adult novels such as *The City of Bones*; even though she sees "there is no dynamic to any of it," she reads it simply to develop the friendship: "OK, I'll do this, I'll do this for you." Jennifer passes around *Catcher in the Rye* because she thinks her friends would enjoy that challenge. For Aidan, the positive peer pressure of being around "the Kristen Livingstons [valedictorian] of the world" helped him see that "I have to pick it up" and he said "that kinda showed up in my reading – thing..." so he could "reach their level one day."

Research Question 2

Research Question 2, "What barriers to reading improvement existed for these students?" was addressed by Interview Question 4 ("Tell me about a time when you read something hard" and prompts), Interview Question 6 ("Why do you think most students don't continue to grow as readers as they get older? What would you like to tell teachers who want to help these students become better readers?"), and the story chart artifact (especially the exposition and rising action components). Analysis of the units of meaning of answers to the second part of Interview Question 4, "What made the text challenging?," included the following categories: unfamiliar frame of reference, complex narrative structure, and sophisticated writer's style (including vocabulary and techniques such as imagery).

Responses to Interview Questions 6a and 6b ("Why do you think most students don't continue to grow as readers as they get older?" and "What would you tell teachers who want to help these students become better readers?") allowed participants to explore both barriers that they themselves have experienced as well as ones that may be impeding others. The participants identified what they believed may be barriers for other adolescent readers, including lack of reader-text match regarding interest, lack of motivation to improve on the students' part, narrow choices of texts in school, and unintended outcomes of tracking and differences in teacher quality (Sally said that sometimes students get "stuck" in the college preparatory track, often taught by "teachers who are not that into it"). Analysis of significant statements revealed that this interview question prompted few personal revelations as they considered the broader context for adolescent readers. The barriers to their own reading improvement identified by these participants included curricular organization, slower processing speed and conceptualizing skills required for turning words into mental images, stress, and time constraints, which was the strongest general unit of meaning in this group.

The story chart artifact (especially the exposition and rising action components) gave participants the opportunity to identify barriers to their reading improvements by considering narrative structure (conflict, complications, and rising action) as well as character types (antagonists), but only three statements were made by participants that pointed toward this research question. Phionex identified the demands of his high school studies as a barrier to his reading growth, saying that high school "pretty much kind of *killed* my reading as compared to what it was before." Jairo's and Devontay's barrier was text complexity in general; Jairo struggled as he moved independently "from reading these really popular, easy books to going to the obscure books," and Devontay said that before he improved he didn't like to read because he

"didn't understand a lot of words." No other participants mentioned any barriers to reading improvement in this data collection.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3, "What high school-related reading experiences, if any, hold meaning for adolescent readers?" was directly addressed by Interview Question 5 ("What are some of your high school experiences, if any, that you think helped you become a better reader?") and indirectly approached by some participants in response to Interview Question 3 ("Why do you think you are becoming a better reader?), Interview Question 4 ("Tell me about a time when you read something hard or challenging"), Interview Question 6, the story chart artifact if they text they chose to discuss sprang from a school context, and the reading observation if, again, it was connected to a school-related experience.

Interview Question 5, "What are some of your high school experiences, if any, that you think helped you become a better reader?" invited students to reflect on the possible connection between what they had experienced in school with the personal growth they had achieved. All but one of the participants indicated multiple and direct experiences related to high school that they felt helped them grow, and only one participant only referenced implicit influence from a single high school experience. When the units of general meaning as recorded from this interview question were analyzed through the lens of Research Question 1 (What influences have impacted the lived experiences of these students as improving readers?), four categories of influences were delineated: participation in advanced-level coursework, involvement with highly qualified and helpful English teachers, impact of instructional activities (such as providing background information, implementing hands-on activities, reading with students, explaining, sequencing instruction creating effective discussion questions, explicitly teaching language

skills, and requiring analytical writing in response to independent reading), and opportunities to engage their individual points of view.

Interview Question 4 gave participants the opportunity to share some strategies that work for them when reading a challenging text. Participants were also asked "What do you do when reading something difficult?" and "Where did the idea for them [these reading strategies] come from?" in order to continue exploring what they have experienced in terms of the phenomenon. Analysis of the participants' units of meaning revealed five groups of techniques and three sources of those techniques. The five groups of techniques are using context clues; employing text features; drawing on outside resources; rereading, skipping, chunking, and varying reading pace; and utilizing mindfulness, intentional focus, or logic. The three sources of those techniques were friends or family members (Molly and Arianna), school or teachers (Molly, Jennifer, Kimberly, and Aidan, who said that he thought he had become "conditioned" to use them), and intuitive or unknown (all other participants).

Interview Question 6 also gleaned a category of significant statements that includes those related to the school contexts in which these students find themselves embedded. Two subcategories emerged from the analysis: instructional strategies and systemic structures. All but one participant made significant statements regarding instructional strategies as an important context. These strategies included teaching students how to deal with unfamiliar words, committing class time for reading, teaching and practicing skills that enhance depth of understanding, including diverse genres in required readings, connecting to individual interests, facilitating and modeling enjoyment of reading, discussing reading with students, providing incentives and accountability for reading, assigning smaller "bite-sized chunks" of material to read (as expressed by Jairo), Socratic seminars, reading aloud, showing film versions of novels,

and finding out what students consider enjoyable (or "relatable," as Kimberly said). Other aspects of the school context mentioned by five participants touched upon a more complex component of their situation: systemic school structures that both encouraged and restricted growth. Teacher quality and the perception that lower-level classes were taught by less qualified and less enthusiastic teachers was cited by Aaliyah and Sally. Aaliyah continued to explore the repercussions of lower academic standards when she said that for many students, "So it's like accumulative, then they get to the point in high school it's where, well, I've never really had to read anything before, so why should I read it now?"

Other systemic restrictions on growth that the participants recognized were lack of choice and variety regarding books that were assigned as common reading; however, they also recognized some systemic structures that offered to them contexts for growth, such as the benefits gleaned for Sally when placed in a gifted and talented English class where "you are with the smarter kids who you can talk to about what you read."

When completing the story chart artifact, participants included references to high school experiences that confirmed two previous statement categories, relationships with teachers and instructional strategies, as well as the impact of reading complex texts accompanied with rigorous coursework and expectations. Similarly, reading complex texts, accompanied with rigorous coursework and expectations, was cited by three participants. For example, three participants specifically referenced their sophomore-year literary research project as an important element of their reading improvement story. Phionex studied *The Great Gatsby* through two critical lenses, formalism and historicism, in order to write his first literary research paper, and he directly connected that experience with his increased reading scores: "I'm pretty sure something happened in there, and I'm pretty sure it was probably, uh, probably reading *The*

Great Gatsby, honestly." Molly studied *Fahrenheit 451* for a similar assignment, and said this about the experience:

> Even though I didn't get a good grade on that little part [the research paper][giggles], uh,
> it still helped, I guess. It made me a better reader because I became slightly more
> independent even though not fully independent obviously. . . . It pushed me a little bit
> farther.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4, "What characteristics are shared among adolescent readers who have experienced better-than-expected growth?" was addressed throughout the interview, the story chart artifact, and the reading observation. The data analysis revealed insights into both the processes and the traits of these improving readers. Regarding processes, the reading observation was analyzed using hermeneutic analysis of language used in self-talk and in responses to the researcher, visual data analysis of patterns of subvocalizations and silent readings, and pacing and sequencing of eye movements as indicators of attention during silent reading (captured by cursor movement). Additionally, self-report of reading processes gleaned from all three data collections was also be included. Regarding traits**,** the story chart artifact, several interview questions, and the reading observation (both self-talk and responses to the researcher's debriefing) were analyzed holistically using Hycner's steps in addition to hermeneutic analysis to determine categories of meaning. Reading processes will be presented first, followed by traits of these readers. The table below outlines this study's findings with regard to shared characteristics of improving adolescent readers.

Table 3

Shared Characteristics of Improving Adolescent Readers

Processes	Traits
engage in self-talk	link a landscape to reading
concentrate on distinct segments of text	value progress
exhibit ease with printed text conventions	network for assistance
utilize personalized reading processes	express empathy
experience revelation	experience joy
	manifest agency
	speak the language of learning

Analysis of all three data collections suggested five common processes used by these adolescent readers as they read a challenging text or told about reading.

These readers engage in self-talk. Self-talk was present in reading observation screencasts in 10 of the 12 participants, and both of the participants who did not share any comments during their independent reading made a reference to a thought, question, or response that they had had during their reading. Patterns of self-talk that emerged during analysis of the screencasts include summative self-talk, in which the participant chose to share only after completing the reading of the passage; linear-sequential self-talk, in which participants shared self-talk as they moved through the passage; and nonlinear-nonsequential self-talk, in which the participant shared self-talk that moved and flowed through the passage.

The first category of significant statements includes both comments made after reading in the debrief that reflect engagement and comments made immediately after reading the passage. Sally and Devontay did not make any comments during the reading observation, but during the

debrief, they both referenced thoughts or questions that they had had while reading. One participant, Molly, saved her self-talk sharing until after she had completed the reading of the passage, then she shared a lengthy summative commentary of 234 words. The second category of comments, linear-sequential self-talk, included eight participants: Phionex, who made 17 comments in 3:02 minutes; Aaliyah, who made 13 comments in 6:11; Kimberly, who made 11 comments in 5:30; NaTalia, who made 10 in 5:10; Aidan, who made eight comments in 4:10; Brianna , who made seven comments in 4:38; Jairo, who also made seven comments in 2:45; and Jennifer, who made five comments in 2:39. All of these participants' comments corresponded to the portion of the passage they were reading, and their comments unfolded while they read. One participant, Arianna, who made 21 comments in 6:25 minutes, shared self-talk that ebbed and flowed through the passage as her understanding grew and her connections enriched. She exhibited at least four interpolations in which comments required that she refer to earlier parts of the text, then she moved forward in the passage.

These readers concentrate on distinct segments of the reading observation text.
Another aspect of the reading process used by these improving readers was the frequency of comments connected to different portions of the text that emerged during data analysis. See Appendix E for the frequency of comments. While comments were connected to 45 different parts of the one-page text (23 of them connected to the list of authors in the second paragraph), participant comments in self-talk clustered around six segments, resulting in self-talk comments during the reading observation from between four and six participants. Four participants commented on the title of the text that the speaker of the memoir was reading (*A Book of Prefaces*), four responded to one particular named author in the text (Anatole France), and four responded to the repetition of a food item and a reference to setting toward the end of the passage

("As dawn broke I ate my pork and beans, feeling dopey, sleepy"). Five participants responded in their self-talk to the culminating sentence of the first paragraph ("what amazed me was not what he said, but how on earth anybody had the courage to say it"), six to the culminating sentence of the second paragraph ("And how did one pronounce their names?"), and six to the culminating sentence of the fourth and final paragraph ("Would I, filled with bookish notions, act in a manner that would make the whites dislike me?").

This focus on distinct segments of the reading observation text was present also in the cursor movement of 10 of the 12 participants. Part of the data collected from the reading observation was the pattern or path of cursor on the screen of the electronic text as an indicator of the place in the text that was being read and the participant's movement through the text. These patterns or paths were analyzed visually after being traced on transparencies laid atop the researcher's computer screen while the screencast was being viewed, then the transparencies were copied onto paper to preserve the pattern or pathways. The similarities and differences between and among the patterns or pathways of the cursors were then visually analyzed in order to explore portions of the text that seemed visually interesting or challenging to the participants. Ten of the 12 participants indicated increased attention, varied pacing, and more attention to segments of words in the list of authors that was both central to the passage and most difficult for the participants to comprehend.

These readers exhibit ease with printed text conventions. Additionally, these adolescent readers who have made ambitious gains while in high school exhibit ease with the conventions of printed texts as evidenced in the presence of distinctive patterns of cursor movements while reading. While most participants' cursor movement was interrupted in the various ways as analyzed above, their patterns with the portions of the text that were more

familiar and on grade-level were very similar to each other's. For the 11 participants who utilized the cursor to indicate movement through the text, all of them used their cursor from left to right and from the top of the page to the bottom of the page during the majority of the reading observation.

These readers utilize personalized reading processes. While it may be counterintuitive for differences to be a defining element of shared process of these readers, these readers' processes so distinctively varied from each other that it did indeed emerge as an aspect for exploration. The patterns and pathways analyzed from the cursor movement during their reading observation diverged significantly from each other after the first few lines of the passage. The visual analysis of the screencasts of cursor movement suggested four types of stylistically individual approaches to tracking movement through the text, each reflecting personalized elements.

Five participants exhibited very regular cursor movements from left to right and from the top of the page to the bottom throughout the independent reading of the passage; however, their cursor movement changed in the following ways: from methodical to pulsing or jagged (Jairo and Devontay), from wide to narrow (Phionex and Kimberly), and from connected to text to disconnected and placed in margin at the most challenging point in the text (Kimberly). NaTalia's cursor movement was significantly out of sync with her subvocalizations and self-talk. Two participants' patterns were characterized by initial smoothness that was replaced with loops and squiggles at different points in the reading passage and three participants' cursor pathways were characterized by jagged angles that presented in very individual ways. The most distinctive cursor pattern was exhibited by Arianna, who began with her cursor in the right margin, squiggling down the page. She then picked it up in the left margin and slowly arced it upward

across the top of the page, then moved it down the right margin in a smooth slope. She then initiated a more regular use of her cursor to track movement through the second paragraph, the list of questions and author names, but then did not engage the cursor while reading the third paragraph. She then swooped down with the cursor to circle and connect words on the page with her self-talk, with Baldwin's "feeling something new" and her revelation of the role that color played in this memoir. Her cursor pattern during the final lines of the passage was characterized by angles, arcs, and smooth slopes.

The purpose of collecting data from the screencast of the cursor movement during the reading observation was to attempt to make the invisible process of reading visible to some small degree. Examining the cursor patterns and pathways of the 11 participants who used the cursor to track their movement through the text revealed similar systematic processes that was also as individual as signatures or fingerprints. Therefore, part of the process of these adolescent readers who have made ambitious gains while in high school reflects a personalization of effective ways of approaching printed texts.

These readers experience revelation. While some participants attained comprehension in measured exchange of self-talk questions and answers from the text, analysis of the data using Hycner's steps revealed that seven of the 12 participants articulated a sudden flash of understanding as a distinctive element of their reading processes, some occurring during the self-talk of the independent reading observation and others occurring during discussion with the researcher. For some participants, like Arianna, not only do they record the phenomenon of reading comprehension, but also their own self-talk seems to have the effect of increasing comprehension of the significance of the passage.

For half of the participants, talking with the researcher provided them with an opportunity to experience increased comprehension, and six participants (including one from the previous analysis of categories of significant statements, Phionex) articulated some degree of revelation of meaning during the debrief discussion with the researcher. This moment of revelation was articulated using a variety of phrases, para-vocalizations, self-interrupting, self-correcting comments, new questions, and interjections, such as "oh," "wait," "I see it now," and "I get it." Therefore, the analysis of the significant statements regarding increased comprehension both from self-talk and from discussion with me suggested that talking is a significant component of the reading process for seven of these 12 improving adolescent readers.

In addition to these processes, analysis of all three data collections utilizing Hycner's method revealed six shared characteristics of these improving readers. Categories of significant statements were determined through analysis of the data by using a simple coding method on the printouts of all participant data, by using the search function available in Word, and by conducting hermeneutic analysis of intended and contextual meaning of participant statements as verified in the transcripts and audio recordings. Once the categories of significant statements were determined, each transcript was examined twice for each category, and sub-categories emerged for some of the categories of significant statements. Regarding shared traits, the analysis suggested that these improving adolescent readers all link a landscape to reading, value progress, network for assistance, express empathy, experience joy, manifest agency, and speak the language of learning.

These readers link a landscape to reading. While all 12 participants exhibited evidence that they visualized, to some degree, the setting of the passage from their reading observation, analysis of the data across all three collections suggested an interesting pattern or category of

association of reading with place. Ten of these participants made at least one significant statement that associated space, a place, or a geography with reading, ranging from literal places to imaginary spaces. There were 17 significant statements from six participants involving *library* as a specific place associated with reading. Four participants made at least one significant statement that linked a figurative or imaginary landscape to reading. Brianna made a vague reference to reading's ability to transport readers to a new, imaginary space when she defined reading by saying, "Well, I like reading so it's – kind of like a different place – it means – it just takes you to a different place." Kimberly said that "there is no real meaning [for *reading*], but like when I hear the word, I think – about – sitting on my couch with the light turned on, and like, snuggled up with a book, and I'm just like totally engrossed in it." Jairo said that he likes "to imagine someone sitting in a tree with a book and just like laying in the tree, like on a branch or something against the thick part of the tree, the trunk, I guess, and just reading a book there...." For these participants, these landscapes link reading to comfort, nurture, freedom, and independence.

These readers value progress. The participants each expressed a deep regard for progress, and several participants extended that value to the progress of others as well. This is a phenomenon within itself, as several participants commented on their peers' disdain for progress, both academic and personal. NaTalia discovered that her social capital was decreased as her conversational vocabulary increased (which she connected to her reading growth) when she was younger: "It was frustrating when you can't find somebody to tit-for-tat with your brain level, if you want to call it that [laugh] – so it's hard to hold a conversation with people around you if they don't understand." Within this data collection and analysis, "value progress" was defined as any group of words that reflected a celebration of reading improvement, a desire to develop as

readers, or a respect for growth in any aspect of life. Overall, there were 121 significant statements expressing this value for progress, and individual participant responses ranged in frequency from three (Devontay and Kimberly each) to 26 (Aaliyah). The participants expressed that they value progress through explicit words and phrases, implicit associations and body language, and nonverbal communication when discussing their reading improvement.

These readers network for assistance. Another trait that emerged through analysis of all three data collections, using Hycner's steps, was the importance of social networks, or webs of relationships, in participants' experiences of becoming better readers. There were 146 significant statements that were organized into two categories of units of meaning regarding networking for assistance: the first related to making meaning from texts and the second related developing a reading identity and sense of self-worth.

Networking to make meaning from texts. All participants utilized a network of relationships and resources to assist them when they faced struggles in reading. Two subcategories of outcomes by accessing social networks to improve reading comprehension emerged through analysis of the data. The use of social networks to discover and access support resources, new reading challenges, and deeper comprehension of shared texts and a more significant patterns of social networking to develop a sense of the meaning of text emerged through analysis.

First, the resources mentioned by these participants spanned a wide variety of reading supports, including using a dictionary to look up unfamiliar words (Jennifer, Phionex, and Sally), using margin notes to find definitions or increase contextual understanding (Kimberly, Arianna, and Molly, including two uses during the reading observations), accessing study guides available on the Internet (Arianna and Molly), listening to audiobooks before or during reading of a

challenging text (NaTalia and Molly), intermingling reading a text and watching the movie based on that text (Devontay), and utilizing specialized glossaries and indices created by an author of fantasy (Jairo). The way these improving readers used these resources varied, but all stated that these resources that existed in their network assisted in their comprehension.

While these participants found that networking for resources to improve their comprehension was effective, analysis of the data suggested that relationships within their social networks have also led to new and more challenging texts and increased comprehension of a particular text. These social networks were populated with friends, family members, and educational professionals, all of whom contributed to the development of these readers' comprehension. Analysis of the data suggested that the participants' social networks led to new reading challenges and to increased comprehension of a particular text as there were 67 significant statements made by 11 of the 12 participants.

Additionally, seven of these improving readers also networked for assistance to increase their comprehension of a challenging text. They connected with teachers, friends, and family in order to unlock the meaning of particular texts. Relationships with teachers were cited by seven participants as important to their increased comprehension of a particular text: NaTalia needed assistance to conquer *Lord of the Flies*, Kimberly noticed that a particular high school teacher was "more attentive" and would give examples and clear explanations, Devontay enjoyed the read-alouds that characterized one of his high school classes when he made his ambitious gains as a reader, Arianna found good notes from lectures in addition to a teacher's emphasis on archetypes and structures helpful, and Aaliyah, Molly, and Sally cited strong relationships with teachers as important to their willingness to ask questions and engage in discussions as their

comprehension grew. These same three participants specifically mentioned friends and classmates as important in specific comprehension tasks.

Last, three participants specifically mentioned networking with family members to unlock meaning of a complex text. Molly's older brother helped her access meaning and study guides when she was reading books similar to what he had studied, and NaTalia recalled sitting and reading with her father who would help her study what she didn't understand in her independent reading. Arianna mentioned two significant family members that she relied on to assist her in developing understanding of challenging readings: her mother, who helped her understand her required "old" literature readings "because I knew she [her mother] had read them," and her grandmother, to whom she turned for assistance with historical context and general understanding of *The Bell Jar*. She said that she remembered discussing this book in depth while her family was "on holiday, vacation," and she "appreciated that I could hear some truthful elements of the time period from somebody who had experienced it."

Networking to develop a reading identity and sense of self-worth. All participants utilized a web of relationships to assist them in developing a reading identity and a sense of self. Social networks including friends, family, and educators resulted in short-term gains that allowed these improving readers to access resources, take on new reading challenges, and increase comprehension of challenging texts, but the long-term contributions of being deeply embedded in social networks led to the development of the participants' sense of self as confident and capable readers. There were 61 significant statements made by all 12 of the participants, ranging from one significant statement by Brianna, who credited one teacher with praising her improvement as a reader at a critical time, and one by Jairo, who received a watershed book as a gift, to 10 significant statements from Aaliyah and 12 from NaTalia, both of whom emphasized

the importance of the connection between their sense of self as a reader and their relationships with family members. Analysis of the data from all three data collection methods suggests the centrality of teachers, friends, and family in the reading identity development of these improving readers.

While the importance of peer relationships in identity development undergirds much research on adolescent development, the analysis of this data suggested that a strong network of family relationships assisted them in their development of positive reading identities throughout their lives. Reading growth as a path to early independence, supported by family members, was experienced by three participants. Aidan reported that his grandmother took him on long walks as a child and taught him to read the signs in their community, establishing early in his life an identity as a reader and a family member. NaTalia said that her mother "would leave me in the library, she would like *leave* me – ***leave*** –so I'd have to stay in there and I would read," and Aaliyah chafed against the successful reading of the adult members of her family:

> I remember I used to get so jealous because of my mom and my grandma could read things really fast, and it would take me a little bit, and I remember sitting there and saying to myself, "I'm gonna learn how to read really well, even faster than them!" because I want to be the one that finishes first?

Participants also experienced reading, and reading improvement, as a strong component of their family identity and several expressed that their reading improvement was important in the development of their identities as individuals within their family group. Jennifer's sense of herself as a creative spirit within her family was confirmed by her father's suggestion that her style reminded him of a classic Russian author, but for NaTalia, with improved reading came the

ability to discover her own point of view and to assert ownership of her own intellectual property within her family with what she termed "*my* Charles Darwin projects" [emphasis added].

This rich array of methods and relationships has allowed these improving readers to network for assistance in finding useful resources, in connecting with others to increase their comprehension, and in networking within social systems to establish and refine their reading identities.

These readers express empathy. Another shared characteristic of these readers is that they expressed empathy both for other readers, especially readers that struggle or have found success elusive, and for characters in literature. There were 71 significant statements expressing empathy, including 32 significant statements empathetic toward a character or speaker in a text and 39 significant statements empathetic toward other readers. Numbers of significant statement expressing empathy made by participants ranged from one (Aidan, regarding a character or speaker) to nine (Phionex, Jennifer, and NaTalia each). Using Hycner's method resulted in the following categories of significant statements: general empathy toward other adolescent readers based on perceived differences, general empathy toward other adolescent readers based on similarities, cognitive empathy toward characters, and emotional empathy toward characters.

Regarding empathy toward other adolescent readers, analysis of data from all three collections yielded 32 significant statements from 10 of the 12 participants. Empathy originated in perceived differences and lived similarities between the participants and other adolescent readers. First, the empathetic responses that stem from contrasting goals and experiences were expressed by five participants. When asked why she thought some adolescents stopped improving as readers in high school, Brianna pointed to a strong difference: "Some people might think it [reading improvement] doesn't really matter." Sally and Aaliyah, who made four and

three significant statements in this category, respectively, conveyed the ability to step into other students' points of view, even a point of view that does not value reading nor academic challenge that they hold in high esteem. NaTalia's (seven significant statements) experience as a reader who had consistently read above grade level expectations was central in her strong empathy for a friend who had struggled as a reader. She told an anecdote of humiliation about a friend who "couldn't tell whenever a sentence ended, so they made him clap whenever it ended to make him pause [little laugh] — so...."

While these expressions of empathy were founded on perceived differences, the heart of empathy flows from recognizing similar struggles. Sally identified adolescent readers' struggle not as a decoding issue but a meaning-making challenge similar to what she experienced ("I mean, I think most people can *read*, but it's like how you can understand it and apply it to other things in your life, questions, and how you interpret what you read"). Molly, who made five significant statements in this category, used the plural first-person pronoun "we" to identify with universal stressors high school students face – academic commitments, anxiety, and peer pressure, all of which Molly discussed as factors in her own reading improvement story – and the plural third-person pronoun "they" for students who had experienced similar struggles with which she can empathize but did not choose to share in the data collection from her own life.

Regarding empathy expressed toward characters in texts, participant responses were analyzed using Hycner's steps, revealing instances of both cognitive and emotional empathy. First, cognitive empathy, or statements that communicate a similarity or coherence in thinking between the participant and a character, will be addressed. Brianna said she approaches reading from this cognitive empathy perspective as she says she tries "to put myself into the place, like I *was* that person." This suggests that she attempts to position herself within the text, not just in

sympathy with the character's point of view but as embedded as possible in the context of the story.

While the cognitive empathy articulated by several participants is interesting, participant responses that contained expressions of emotional empathy were rich, complete, and replete with struggle. When Brianna discussed her appreciation of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, she communicated an emotional resonance with Tom Robinson when she said, "I felt sad for like the guy that was getting blamed for what he did to the girl but he didn't do it." Other books taught in a typical high school curriculum elicited strong emotional empathy from participants. When asked in the debriefing of the reading observation about a book that changed him, without hesitation, Devontay, who made four significant statements about characters, chose Elie Wiesel's *Night*, then struggled to separate his empathy with Wiesel from his reaction to the historicity and the literary merit of the book:

I didn't like it [the memoir], it kinda made me mad. [silence] I'm just – [silence] – I don't

know, he just kinda had a hard life, I don't know. I didn't – I mean, I Iiked it but I didn't.

Phionex, who made five significant statements in this category, expressed one of the strongest emotionally empathetic responses to a character as he retold the story that had a strong impact on him. In this quest tale, a young samurai finds the Riddling Monk who tells him "Find your heart, and you find your home." For Phionex, the participant who was homeless and in conflict with his traditional Hindu family during the schoolyear of the study, this had resonance beyond the novel: "It was just like – my home isn't exactly – I – it isn't my home until I – that's where my heart stays." His heart, indeed, beat in perfect synchronicity with the young samurai's. This sort of strong empathy with characters was experience by Arianna as well, as she said she felt the grief and tension in *The Fault in Our Stars* as "a punch in the gut."

This sort of powerful identification with characters also marked Arianna's response to the narrator of the reading observation text, *Black Boy*, Richard Wright's autobiographical novel. Arianna's deep resonance was expressed paraverbally when she read the end of the excerpt aloud: "Would I, filled with bookish notions, act in a manner that would make the whites dislike me?" As she read aloud to the researcher, her voice suddenly dropped soft on last word of paragraph, "me," implying that the question was turning to her for examination. Not all participants responded as powerfully as Arianna, but four more of the 12 participants who expressed emotional empathy with the character in the passage. Molly, who made two significant statements in this category, implicitly communicated an empathetic response with strong language perfectly capturing the character's creativity, characterizing them in the most vivid language of her data collections: "extravagant, exuberant ideas that he was putting on these pages."

Regarding the most complex portion of the passage, the narrator's ironic confession of guilt, Arianna responded, "Uhm, I'm kinda of in that line of feeling guilty" regarding the complexities of living between black and white worlds. Aaliyah, who made four statements in this category, went further into the issue of color and guilt in her response that contained many points of emotional empathy. With regard to the issue of color, she said, "I can relate to this where you read something, even if it's not philosophical or whatever, but you just read something and you see it in everything that you see, you kind of think about it all the time," acknowledging her interest in race and identity that she shares with Wright. Her implicit emotional empathy with the narrator, however, was complicated by her initial uncertainty about his race and confirmed by her own experiences with boundaries in the African-American community. During her reading observation, she recorded this final segment of self-talk:

Ok, so they're a person of color, presumably black. That makes a lot of sense because they're talking about all white authors but especially in the black community you're not allowed, it's not, not, uh, encouraged to become like an author, it's like OK – that makes this whole – Ok, that last sentence, like these last couple of sentences like completely change the way you look at the rest of this. Like it compl – like I was honestly imagining somebody who was white just because a lot of the times in popular books the main character is white – but this changes like the way, the tone, the way you read it, the type of person who is like the narrator, it completely changes everything.... That's cool.

In this moment, she recognized the power and limits of empathy as a pathway to meaning as she essentially cracked open the heart of the passage's message about self-perception, race, expectation, and culture.

These readers experience joy. All participants conveyed that they experience joy regarding reading, both through use of explicit language and nonverbal communication. There were a total of 181 significant statements or expressions regarding this shared characteristic, including 118 explicit statements and 63 nonverbal expressions of joy. The level of expression of the experience of or associations with joy ranged from four from Sally (two explicit and two nonverbal) and five from Aidan (four explicit and one nonverbal) to 26 from Molly (16 explicit and ten nonverbal) and 34 for Jennifer (29 explicit statements and five nonverbals).

Words and expressions to include in this analysis were determined through a two-fold analysis process as exemplified here with the word "like." This word presented difficulties as the participants often used this word to introduce a comparison ("books like that"), to assist in communication of thoughts as they develop them (Aidan: "I feel like you can read..."), as a method to gather their thoughts (Sally: "it's like how you can understand it"), or as a way to

communicate preferences for phenomena outside the reach of this study ("Molly: "Tumblr is just the place I like to be to read things"). All of these references were excluded and only uses of the word "like" that communicated joy, pleasure, preference, or positive association were analyzed. To delineate the included and excluded contexts, the search tool in Word was first utilized, which reflected participant use of the word "like" 884 times in the interview transcripts. Then, the researcher reread transcripts and again listened to recordings of each interview to ensure that each relevant instance of the word "like," along with contextually significant synonyms, was highlighted, analyzed, and tabulated. Any use of the verbal or nonverbal communication under analysis here that did not refer to the act or process of reading or to texts being read or having been read previously were excluded. This same process was utilized for the other explicit word statements, such as "joy" and its larger grammatical form "enjoy," as well as nonverbal communication, including laughs and giggles (analysis excluded uncomfortable or anxious laughter), hand claps, exclamations, and others.

Explicit statements of joy included positive associations with reading (as expressed in words such as "like," grammatical forms of "interesting," and value judgments using words such as "good") along with explicit statements of pleasure (including words such as "enjoy" and "glad") regarding the process of reading and the works that participants read or had read. Interestingly, Aidan expressed an increase in pleasure when he discovered a link between the style and meaning of the passage, however complicated his explanation, in the reading observation: "I find that really weird-cool – but yeah. And like he's talking like he's on the level with when he's writing it – like I, I enjoy it." The nonverbal expressions of joy regarding reading included the following: laughs, giggles, handclapping and exclamations as captured with

exclamation marks in transcripts. Overall, there was much laughter and other nonverbal

expression of pleasure as participants explored their reading experiences.

These readers manifest agency. These improving adolescent readers also all share the

characteristic of manifesting agency in the way that they discuss reading in that they do not

credit or blame other people or conditions for their improvement or for their struggles, and they

expect others who want to improve to be empowered also. There was a total of 62 significant

statements that reflected the manifestation of agency spread throughout the three data collections

for all 12 participants, ranging from two significant statements (Jairo) to 12 significant

statements (Aaliyah). Agency is understood as the belief and the ability to act and to effect

change on one's own behalf. This is exemplified in Arianna's story chart artifact in a 135-word

section. Phrases such as these reflect the type of language used by all the participants and also

strongly capture her individual sense of agency: "I read," "I had to read," "I loved," "I had to

take in," "I wrote," "and when I turned it in I was really proud of myself that I had gotten that in

depth," and "I was looking at everything I read." Through analysis of the three data collections

using Hycner's steps, four categories of units of meaning emerged regarding manifestation of

agency: applying individual effort, making difficult choices, choosing texts, and making meaning

from texts.

First, agency begins with individual effort as expressed by Sally ("I think you can only be

as motivated as you want to be"), Brianna ("I was trying harder," "I started reading more," "I

read because I really want to," and "I'm gonna finish it"), and NaTalia ("I started reading his

books, and from there – it just kept going. I kept reading different things") regarding their own

effort, but NaTalia also suggested that this application of agency would benefit all adolescent

readers: "We [students] hate paperwork and homework, but if we do more, it [learning] will stick."

Other participants emphasized the power of their sense of agency in making other hard choices that ultimately impacted their reading. Instead of withdrawing during a difficult and lonely time, Brianna said this: "So instead of making friends, she picked up books and started reading." Agency to choose individual identity over typical social constructs was expressed by Kimberly also when she said, "I guess I kinda like eventually grew out of that [trying to be "cool"]. Like you know I'm gonna do my own thing, I'm gonna be who I am, I'm not gonna try to just be who everybody wants me to be. So I got back into reading."

A third category of manifestation of agency emerged with regard to choice of reading materials. Phionex expressed personal responsibility for the negative effect of his limited range of books ("I should have expanded my horizons"). Other participants exerted their agency in refusing to read certain texts: Molly rejected a book that her friends enjoyed ("I'm not gonna read this"), and Aaliyah unapologetically asserted that she would not read books that didn't have some merit to her: "I didn't try to force myself to read something that I knew I wouldn't – wouldn't entertain me, wouldn't keep me interested, that I couldn't analyze." NaTalia eloquently countered a victim mentality that students sometimes adopt when they are assigned books that they do not like. Gesturing to the bookshelves in the interview space, she said, "I think that they [students who don't read] think that *this* is all they have to read and *this* is all reading *is* – these books right here – but they never go to venture to the library or pull a book out that they think is interesting – and uhm… I think that's part of it right there, that they don't *try* to read, any more than they have to," suggesting that each individual has the freedom to read beyond the confines of assigned readings.

Another aspect of the manifestation of agency for these adolescent readers was finding themselves empowered to make meaning from challenging texts. Brianna found that altering her pace and self-correcting empowered her for opportunities for increased comprehension ("Oh, I get it – I was going too fast"), and Jairo asserted that it is the reader's job to retain and retrieve esoteric background information, not a flaw in a difficult text, since "there is so much lore involved, uhm, so it's just like you have to keep up with these things from the first book alone." Participants also mentioned the value in "stating our own opinions" (Devontay), "forming my own judgment" (Aaliyah), and using the internet (Arianna) so she can "[look] at everything" and be empowered to "get to the same level of understanding, I just have to sit with it longer." Perhaps, however, it is Aidan, who made some of the fewest statements regarding agency, who will provide a culminating lens for this shared characteristic of manifestation of agency:

> You have to understand that somebody has to want it for themselves, and that's really what it comes down to. Like, just to put it in like layman's terms, you can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink. He or she has to want to do better in order to actually do better.

These readers speak the language of learning. Analysis of the data revealed that all 12 participants were fluent in the language of learning and were driven by expectation of writer's craft, especially expressed with their use of reading and literary analysis terminology, which they used unprompted to discuss what they have read and how they made meaning from the text. After analysis using Hycner's steps, two categories of units of meaning emerged as a shared characteristic. One group consists of significant statements that use the language of learning participants would reasonably encounter across the academic disciplines that target thinking skills and learning process. This includes forms of words that reflect higher-order thinking skills,

such as *analyze*, *interpret*, and *evaluate*, as well as learning process terms, such as *reflect* and *engage*. This also includes learning structures, such as *Socratic seminar, analytical essay,* and *incentive,* as well as parts of texts and study skills from all subjects, such as *detail* and *relevant reason.* The second group consists of significant statements that use the language of learning that participants would most likely encounter specifically as part of their English language arts disciplinary instruction. This includes the language of literary analysis terms, genres and forms, grammar and syntax, and reading skills such as context clues. There were 210 significant statements that reflected the use of the language of learning, including 59 significant statements of cross-disciplinary learning and 151 significant statements reflecting the language of learning specifically in English language arts. This analysis revealed a relationship between the language of learning and these participants' perceptions of themselves as improving readers (both making meaning of texts and of their lives).

For example, Brianna relied more on the language of learning associated with English language arts, using the terms *genre* and forms of the words *describe,* significantly when she explained how she reads so effectively ("You know how they [authors] like write description words? I try to go along with them"). Devontay and NaTalia (both using three cross-curricular and two ELA terms) appropriated a more balanced lexicon synthesizing thinking skills terms. Jairo relied on words that helped him discuss the genre and text features of books he enjoys, especially the central text of his story chart artifact. Those words were drawn exclusively from the language of learning from English instruction and included "lore," "genre," "glossary," and "index." Four participants exhibited a strong integration of academic language when speaking about themselves as improving readers. .Jennifer's use of literary terminology combined with a

mastery of the language of higher-order thinking skills helped her reach an insight about both the passage and herself as an improving reader:

> Uhm, well, this is almost this is pretty similar to if we get a Cold Read and we have to *analyze* it – I know I was automatically kind of looking at how the *sentences* were *arranged* and what different *devices* he was using? – I don't know if that is just out of habit now – I mean, it is still really interesting because it's funny because he's writing about *analyzing style* and wow, I'm *analyzing* his *style* – it's like it's weird.... Right and he has his own *style* while responding to the *style* [laughing] –

Aaliyah exhibited the strongest presence of academic language from both cross-curricular and ELA with 13 and 35 significant statements, respectively. She accurately and judiciously used the terms *analyze*, *interpret,* and *evaluate* twice each and *compare, examine,* and *reflect*, once each, showing mastery of higher-order thinking skills. She also exhibited a deep lexicon of literary terms, including *genre* terms such as *poetry*, *mythology*, and *biography*; *literary devices*, such as *comic relief* and *symbolism*; and elements of narrative writing, such as *first person point of view*, *description*, and *motivation.*

While participants showed varying degrees of confidence with the language of learning, a shared characteristic was their common ability to integrate both cross-curricular and ELA-specific language, without prompting or modeling, to make meaning from a challenging text and to reflect on their own growth as readers.

Themes

Before and after the data from all three collections was analyzed regarding the research questions, I sought unifying themes utilizing Hycner's process. Four themes emerged through these steps: units of meaning were isolated and categorized after being decontextualized from the

transcripts, redundancies were removed in order to create a list of "non-redundant units of

relevant meaning" (Hycner, 1985, p. 287), and general themes were considered then

recontextualized with specifics from the transcripts. These themes were examined and

reconsidered during extensive rereadings of transcripts and the development of a composite

summary with both general and individual themes captured in a single word for each participant.

The four themes that emerged from considering the phenomenon of reading improvement during

high school were Reading as Provocation, Reading as Displacement, Reading as Relationship,

and Reading as Confluence. Themes and representative significant statements are presented

below in Table 4, and each theme will be clarified and examined in the sections that follow.

Table 4

Themes and Representative Significant Statements

Themes	Total No. Statements	Representative Significant Statements	Data Source
Reading as Provocation	70	you had to kind of untangle it	SI
		we were having to switch	SC
		that just changed my perspective	RO
Reading as Displacement	57	you're an outsider	SI
		she felt like the world was closing in	SC
		it sets you apart from people	RO
Reading as Relationship	65	my family really likes to discuss [books] at dinner	SI
		I know I've influenced my friends	SC
		I knew it was her favorite book	RO
Reading as Confluence	222	so I just flow into the book	SI
		everything clicked into place	SC
		it doesn't stop when you stop	RO

Note: SI = Semi-structured Interview, SC = Story Chart Artifact, RO = Reading Observation

Reading as provocation. This theme, Reading as Provocation, reflects participants' experience with reading as a stimulus for cognitive flexibility and for shifting points of view. While there were 70 significant statements analyzed as suggesting this theme, one significant statement from each participant served to represent its multidimensionality. All 12 participants used language that indicated that reading had provoked a significant shift in their thinking about themselves, the text they were reading, or the world in which they live.

Two participants' responses captured the essence of the type of shift that can occur in readers' ideas about themselves when provoked to new thinking as improving readers. When asked why she thought she was becoming a better reader in the interview, Arianna credited her ability and willingness to move into new points of view: "I think that's why I've gotten to be a better reader because I've been able to connect a lot more from other perspectives." Jairo experienced a shift in his own self-perception with the news that he had become a better reader, saying, "It was a good surprise but it was definitely a surprise, like, 'What is this? What is going on?'"

Several participants experienced the provocative potential of reading while they were reading or in reflecting on a previous reading experience that shaped their comprehension of the text itself. NaTalia, whose significant shift in her worldview regarding religion and science drove her to independent reading, found her point of view stirred as she read the text from the reading observation. While stylistically the text "turned very quickly – the end of it – I didn't expect it," she also encountered a new perspective that she struggled to articulate:

> The last sentence [rereads] – is that – the last sentence just throws you – I don't know –
> oh, wait, "I now knew what the white men were feeling" – see, it makes you question if
> he was originally black or is white and writing - because he's white – I don't know...

While *Uncle Tom's Cabin* may have given her an "understanding of, you know, what African-Americans might have been going through in that time, which I know that it changed a lot," her position on both texts and the world will continue to be challenged, as evidenced by her responses.

Phionex expressed a complex relationship among provocative texts, new perspectives, and personal growth that he had experienced as a reader. Regarding his new interest in reading

books outside of his Hindu culture, he said, "It's just that now I'm expanding my horizons to some things I used to be uncomfortable with and now I'm extremely – not *comfortable* but I'm OK with." He pointed to the cumulative effect of reading more sophisticated texts on his reading improvement, saying, "I think it's just that beliefs *shift*, they *shifted* something in my mind that made it easier for me to *see* something." Jennifer said that she gets both pleasure and intellectual stimulation from texts that challenge her perception: "I enjoy books that uhm, that make you believe that maybe the protagonist is the crazy one but you realize it might not be him who's the crazy person – and so it shifts your perspective." Arianna found that intentionally engaging multiple points of view was vital to deepening both her reading skill as well as her comprehension of a particular text, saying that she "wrote like from a historical context and a women's rights context kind of thing." Aaliyah commented multiple times on the power of the individual to intentionally take on new points of view, noting that this was important because "if we switch, maybe we can see a different way we can look at it." This became the most significant feature of her reading observation, a moment in which she responded to her own disequilibrium regarding the racial identity of the narrator by rereading. When she discovered that he was indeed black as recorded in her self-talk, she commented in her debrief that this "completely change[d] the way you look at the rest of this," and that this "completely changed the way that I had previously looked at the passage because it brought like a new depth to what they're saying."

For other participants, reading inspired a fresh perspective on the world and their place in it. For Brianna, an assigned reading in school (*To Kill a Mockingbird*) shifted her perception about the realities of racial prejudice, saying, "It taught me that just because someone is a different race than you they don't deserve to be treated different." For Aidan, a book that he had

read on his own (*Tarzan*) opened his eyes to the power of the status quo, saying, "It changes the way you see the world around you, you take certain things for granted, I guess." Additionally, during the reading observation debrief, he stated that the reading passage "changes the way you see the world around you," including "familiar relationships ... you get a different view of that from just reading stuff." Molly welcomed the sometimes dramatic shift that she experienced while reading because it "persuades you to think in a different light, and I think that is amazing" Sally also valued the power of reading as the primary stimulus for new thinking, especially for her in the world of politics: "I think like finding out information, things you didn't know before can change your view of things – that's how you find out, by reading." Devontay was still struggling to process the shift that occurred for him as a reader of *Night*, and he chronicled a quickly flowing stream of responses from "I didn't like it, it kinda made me mad" to silence, to "I mean, I liked it but I didn't like what was going on it." Kimberly's discovery of new points of view in her reading about the Holocaust also awakened her to a hard truth: "That just changed my perspective because I thought people were supposed to be good. And I was like, well, I guess not [small laugh]." Clearly, these adolescent readers who have made ambitious gains while in high school allow reading to provoke new insights.

Reading as displacement. This theme, Reading as Displacement, acknowledges the participants' lived experiences of displacement, whether through geographical displacement, social isolation or exclusion, depression and anxiety, or other kinds of disruption, and the role that reading played. For some, reading was a response to displacement; for others, reading was a catalyst for displacement. While it can be reasonably argued that these types of experiences are universal for teenagers, what is noteworthy from the data is that they emerged so persistently from their interviews and stories of how they became a better reader. For the analysis of this

theme, participant experiences were examined individually to allow their stories to direct the analysis.

Devontay did not communicate a major displacement, but his comments revealed a more generalized exclusion or disconnect between his interests and his life. He had read a lot of books about basketball but said he did not play basketball, he had read books about the military but did not specify an important relationship with anyone who had served, and his participation in this study was delayed by a disciplinary suspension, which by definition is a displacement from the school community. Sally also did not communicate a major displacement, but she said that she "usually [read] a lot because I'm at the beach or travelling," and her participation in the study was also delayed by a significant series of absences. Neither of these participants indicated that reading was either a catalyst or a response to their experience, but it is of note that this type of rupture with community, no matter what the circumstances, was a commonality in all 12 of these adolescent readers who have experienced the phenomenon of ambitious reading gains during high school. Regardless as the whether the exclusion stemmed from economic privilege or cultural disadvantage, reading was the way that both Devontay and Sally found connection – Devontay with his friend Rosa and the librarians in seeking new reading experiences, and Sally with her classmates who were also struggling to conquer rigorous reading assignments in Advanced Placement courses.

Jairo included a relocation event from Vermont to a state in a different region of the United States as part of his interview and suggested that it was connected not to reading *per se* but to his reading improvement particularly. When asked when he thought he might have made ambitious gains as a reader, he said, "We didn't really do a lot of reading and testing at my other school cuz I came from a school in Vermont."

Geographic isolation, relocation, and social exclusion were experienced by Kimberly, who saw reading as both creating and bridging dislocation. When she began her reading story, she started by telling that "we lived out in Ridge Spring, and so – there wasn't like a whole lot to do" in that rural community, and when she relocated with her family to a larger town, "there was like more to do, but – we still stuck in like, in that, to where we liked reading more, and – instead of going and hanging out with people." Later, Kimberly acknowledged the social pressure to conform to disinterest in reading when she said, "We had that whole thing where you want to be cool, you don't want to be the nerd who sits in a room and reads, so uhm," and she experienced some social exclusion when she "got back into reading."

NaTalia experienced social isolation and exclusion that were both linked to reading. Her more sophisticated vocabulary gained by "being raised around older people so I knew more mature conversations" created a distance between herself and her peers who "weren't able to stay on the same level." She acknowledged that "it takes a little while to get used to it [being known as smart] cuz when they notice that, you're an outsider, but then you have to find other outsiders."

Brianna experienced fear and anxiety as well as social isolation when she transitioned to high school and "felt like the world was closing in on her." In her third-person reading story artifact, she said, "She didn't have any friends, so instead of making friends she picked up books and started reading." For her, reading was a response to social isolation in a fearful time, but she continued in her interview to say that reading also created distance between herself and her peers: "I know some of the words other people can't pronounce and understand," which has set her apart as a higher achiever in a class in which students did not necessarily value progress as these participants did.

Jennifer also experienced geographical isolation, social isolation, and relocation as part of her reading story as she attended a very small private school while she lived in a rural area prior to moving to her current residence, but her most significant experience of dislocation was her father's relocation to Canada for work. She identified this event as the "inciting incident" in her reading story and said, "Yeah, that's about the time that I really switched from uhm like *New York Times* bestsellers to like classic lit and like serious literature." However, reading was not only her response to this major dislocation of an important figure in her life but also the way that she maintained and cultivated her relationship with her father. For her, reading and discussing "classic lit" with her father "really brought us even closer even though he moved away."

Phionex experienced relocation, social exclusion, and cultural isolation as his family, without warning, packed up one day to move from Canada to America, then with the same abruptness, from one state to another. The first move created a distinct fissure in his life as he had to leave behind friends that he could not have contact with until several years later. He was also ridiculed for what he termed "a unibrow" for which he "was bullied a lot for it, and I – I – I didn't have many friends." As a high school senior, he still did not have as much peer interaction as he desired, as his "parents are pretty strict on socializing, they don't really allow for it." At the same time, "I used to be very cultural to my own, to the Hindu culture and I didn't like reading about other cultures as much," a community that was very small and in which he was not very enmeshed during high school. In his search for place, Phionex sought escape and solace in reading, and said, "In a way I found books as an abode for me." Reading was a response to many layers of displacement for Phionex, and "that was the biggest connector, between us, between me and my books." Phionex continues to seek his "abode" and he shared a poignant anecdote about a book that was important to him:

A recent book that I read, *The Young Samurai,* series had just one over-reaching idea of, well, he's trying to get home, he's stranded in Japan and he's trying to get home and back to England, but he's just lived with the Japanese for so long that – uhm, in the beginning of the series, one of the, there is a quest, and on a quest he finds, the quest is for the Riddling Monk, and the Riddling Monk riddles him: "Find your heart, and you find your home." And he doesn't realize until he's about to step on the ship to go back to England that he – it's almost three, four years later, -- that his home and his heart are both now in Japan. So he almost made the fatal mistake of actually going and leaving for England without having his heart with him... [inaudible] It was just like, my home isn't exactly – I – It isn't my home until I – that's where my heart stays.

Reading was a catalyst for dislocation for Aidan, who experienced social isolation as he realized that "I kind of grow in certain ways [as a reader] where other don't," which set him apart. He continued: "You realize that someone else isn't growing at the same rate that you are, there's a kind of distance between you and whatever group you are in." Reading was also his response to dislocation – he stated twice that at important junctures in his interview that "I didn't have many friends so I read."

Aaliyah experienced separation from extended family, social isolation, and anxiety as expressed in her interview, in fact using the word "displaced." Regarding separation from extended family, she said "her mother's parents [lived] either far North or far South, and her father's parents lived on a completely different continent." Socially, she experienced intense feelings of isolation connected to both her appearance ("I was going through puberty and all kinds of things were happening that were like, ugh....") and her own budding sense of self that left her "struggl[ing] a lot in school, just general feeling out of place, anxious" because "she had

a lot of things about her that weren't like other people." Her extensive vocabulary as well as the ideas she wanted to communicate, both essential characteristics of sophisticated readers, were also a catalyst for social isolation. She explained: "It sets you apart from people when you start to have a vocabulary that is more advanced, or you have ideas that are not as cut and dried, especially in the South." She was "kind of ridicule[d]" for "not dumbing [herself] down" and people told her that they avoided being friends with her "because [she was] kind of intimidating and kind of like a goody two shoes. It was just because of the way that I talked that people got intimidated because they sensed that I was not kind of like on the same wavelength kind of thing."

However, the relationship between reading and displacement was complex for Aaliyah. As she told her reading story artifact, she chose third person grammatical point of view to share the following:

> She had never felt more kind of displaced from her peers just for the fact that reading so much had brought her into a different kind of level of maturity and vocabulary than her other friends and she was going through a lot of bodily changes that made her *very* different from all of her friends. So she just kind of went deeper into reading and kind of drew away from a lot of her friends and from her family.

For her, reading was catalyst, it was response, and it was catalyst yet again for further isolation. Eventually, however, reading was a positive response to these many layers of displacement as "she started reading books that weren't the type of books that she'd always been reading, she branched out into new genres and ... try new things and kind of try a different approach at school and just at life." As she said, "reading was a constant" for her, and she imagines that one day she will live in a house on a lake filled with books.

Molly experienced relocation, family dysfunction, and anxiety as types of dislocation in her reading development. She moved to a very different region of the United States during elementary school, and her father died when she was a young teen. As a writer herself, Molly reads to inform her own craft, and she knows that her point of view sets her apart: "I think it was about how life experiences were a lot different, especially with family, so – I don't know ... If I was to write something about the value of my parents I think it would be a lot different." She said that she is often reluctant to "bring personal experiences to it because there's other people – that causes anxiety and stress and you don't want to be judged by your peers, because that's something that happens a lot." Molly also noted how important an understanding literature teacher can be in bridging the gap for students like her who bring something different to the discussion of readings in class: "You don't feel like you are gonna fall [dramatic movement] into a chasm of ... upsetness about everything that's going on cuz ... she understands that we have outside lives – and that helps."

Arianna, a high-achieving senior, did not articulate a particular dislocation in her interview, but she did anticipate that reading will help her bridge her next geographical, social, and cultural displacement – going to Boston College. When considering her reading progress, she said, "At least this will be a definite building block for wherever I go from here. The next step is not going to be that big – an easy transition hopefully."

Reading as relationship. This theme, Reading as Relationship, captures the centrality of reading in these adolescent readers' relationships. A metaphor may be most helpful in exploring this theme. Yale's Nicholas Christakis explored the nature of human relationships using "social networks" as a way of understanding how relationships form and change, suggesting that the network is not made of people but of connections, and what flows in these connections is what

truly makes the network (Christakis & Fowler, 2007). Building on this metaphor, the participants' social networks are made up of adult readers in the educational community, peers, and their families, and what flows along the network of relationships is books.

First, several participants mentioned the importance of relationships with adult readers within the educational community. For Aaliyah, the bond between teacher and book began early in her reading story: in first grade, her teacher shared *The Phantom of the Opera* in a read-aloud, and it inspired her "to be able to read something like that." Brianna and Phionex mentioned teachers and librarians as important in her reading story artifact as ones who recognized and encouraged their improvement and that recommended texts to be read and shared.

Additionally, many of these improving adolescent readers shared books with their friends, and more importantly, books form both the structure and the essence of the relationship as the books flow among and connect the readers through the texts. Books connected some participants to peers in a more academic relationship. Sally's only mention of relationships with others was simply implied when she recounted her process of becoming a better reader, a process that linked her with her classmates expressed in a plural first person pronoun: "We had to sit there and actually pick it apart at first," speaking of the new challenge shared in her Advanced Placement classroom. Aidan mentioned a connection between reading and a peer who was not only a classmate but a good acquaintance, saying that shared texts connect him to "the Kristen Livingstons [classmate who was valedictorian] of the world." Molly shared a memory of being asked to read to kindergarten classes when she was in second grade, exemplifying how books connected her to a larger school community of peers.

For other participants, books were an essential component of their friendships. Devontay connected the most important event in his reading story artifact with his friend Rosa, who helped

him move away from choosing books randomly to using the book covers to help him find a book he would actually like. NaTalia, who said that "a lot of my friends are really good readers," read several book series with her friends: "we all read the series – *The Hunger Games*, we all read it, *Twilight* – half of us read it because it was horrible [laughs]." When discussing a popular young adult novel, she said, "I was like I can't finish this, this is terrible, why do you like this?" and that "this is the exact same book every single time," but she started them "because "Alex – she gives them to me and [laughs] like OK here you go, OK I'll do this for you, or I'll do it for other friends." Jennifer not only read with her friends (she picked up *Catcher in the Rye* because she "knew it was [Lily's] favorite book so we could discuss it") but also saw herself an influential in the developing more sophisticated reading preferences in her peers. She said, "I know I've influenced my friends with what they read because when I suggest to my friends, like why don't you read *Cather in the Rye* or something like that," they read it and then talk about it. Molly, who also turned to her friends when she struggled to read a school-assigned novel, shared books with her friends, even though their taste in books is also very different. Aaliyah also read books with her friends, but they diverge not so much by taste in genres but in response to what they read. She said, "Me and my friend read the same books? and then discuss it with them because they almost 90% of the time say something completely different than what I thought." Phionex trusts his friends for meaningful book recommendations – he read *Jane Eyre* after "one of my good friends" told him about it – but for Phionex, books also provided a deeper link with an important friend. When he could not share books with an important friend due to an unexpected move, he strove to find reflected in the books that he read: "I remember I had to find books in which that sort of comrade, uh camaraderie was in those books between characters."

Interestingly, not only did participants discuss the important role of books in their peer relationships, but they also expressed the central connection between reading and family. First, two participants said that shared reading experiences connected them to their siblings: for Molly, reading SparkNotes connected her with her brothers, and for Kimberly, reading was on par with playing in the lives of her and her sister ("me and my sister would like read and just play outside"). However, there was a strong subtheme of adult family members' influence and participation in the reading development of these adolescents. Aidan's great-grandmother taught him to read from neighborhood street signs in their long afternoon walks, and Aaliyah and NaTalia recalled learning how to read with their mothers. NaTalia also shared that she read with her father while she was a child. It is of primary interest, however, the significance of family during the high school years when these readers were making ambitious gains. Aaliyah discussed her father's insistence that she and her sister become good readers and the influence of this value on her during high school. When asked in the interview about a time when he read a challenging book, Jairo discussed a book that was given to him as a gift from a family member. In response to the same interview questions, Kimberly discussed a book that her mother bought for her and her sister, and Phionex shared that his father "made me pick up a book called *Wings of Fire*" which opened up communication between father and son during a difficult time. "I would ask my dad" when he encountered unfamiliar mechanical engineering concepts, and he reported a sense of satisfaction with the experience. Arianna also found books to be a bond between herself and adults in her family. She discussed Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* with her grandmother, and when she was struggling with *Macbeth* and *The Canterbury Tales*, she "[talked] to my mom about those specific books because I knew she had read them before."

Jennifer expressed the strongest experience of books connecting her with her parents of all the participants. Although she spoke the most about her father during her interview, she also said that "my family really likes to discuss [classic books] at dinner, and I think that – I don't know, it's just really important for us – we'll talk about like literature around the dinner table." She acknowledged that reading and discussing sophisticated literature is part of her family identity, saying, "One thing that like really connects us is literature."

Reading as confluence. This theme, Reading as Confluence, reflects the fully integrative nature of the experience of becoming a better reader for these participants, both during reading and in reflecting on their reading improvement. When talking about reading and when reading, participants used language that expressed a sense of confluence, or wholeness and full immersion, as readers. This was explored by the participants in comments that revealed six subthemes: immediacy of the text, cognitive and imaginative engagement, reciprocal improvement, self-awareness and identity assertion, retrieval of previous experiences to inform reading, and the experience of flow.

First, the subcategory of immediacy of the text captures the participants' ability to see themselves within the text (what many students describe as "being relatable") and their expectation that texts should impact their perceptions about the world. During the reading observation particularly (but not exclusively), participants expressed both general and specific ways in which they could relate to the text through similar experiences, reactions, and thoughts, often moving through both superficial aspects of taste to more noteworthy similarities of life situation. One element of Aidan's connection to the reading passage was that, like the author, he "also like[s] pork and beans," and Kimberly connected with the author's habits of thought, saying "I do that, too," and "That's a good question" when she was reading the writer's

rhetorical questions, later saying that it was "really relatable to students in high school." Molly also connected with the writer, finding similarities in writing process ("It's kinda the way I think when I write") and asserting that the passage "kind of connects with me on an emotional level." Arianna was more specific about the emotional connection when she said in her self-talk, "I'm, I'm kind of in that line of feeling guilty ... because it could be me that I could step into that role." Phionex connected with the passage through similar habits: "sounds like something I'd do, similar emotions yeah, I feel like that all the time and an overall acknowledgement that it was like relating to my life – that was the biggest connector." Jennifer keyed in on similar thoughts, saying "Those are some of the same concepts that I have when I read a text" when explaining that she "really related to that." Aaliyah insightfully acknowledged that a book can change us "if it relates back to you own experiences as a human being."

Most the participants also expressed the expectation that what they read will or should impact their lives. Aaliyah and NaTalia expected a text to apply to the "real world" and to school, and Sally stated that she reads "to get something out of it and apply it to the rest of your life." Jennifer expected to "learn something that relates to it, from the world to reading and literature," while Phionex and Arianna desired that what they read impact them personally – Phionex said that what he read "had the same impact on me" as it had on the character, while for Arianna, "it was so easy to apply to me." More specifically, for Devontay, having read books like *Night* "makes me appreciate my life, that I wasn't born during that time."

Another subtheme in the theme category of confluence is cognitive and imaginative engagement. To clarify, these participants expressed not only the ability but the willingness to immerse themselves in reading through the use of both cognition and imagination. Many different words and phrases were utilized by the participants to express the depth and energy of

their cognitive concentration and interest. The concept of concentrated attention regarding the act of reading was present in the data collections with words and phrases such as "keeps your mind awake" (Brianna), "stimulation" (Aidan), "focus" (Aaliyah and Sally twice), "zone" (Sally when she asserted that "you can't just mindlessly read, you have to actually like *zone*"), and "keep up" (Jairo). The demanding active processing that occurred for these participants was expressed in words and phrases that communicate not only effort but also a sense of wonder. NaTalia's search for answers through reading is characterized by looking for what "makes so much more sense," and Brianna commented on how she was "still trying to wrap my mind around why" prejudice results in violence. Their responses also included words and phrases like "interpret" (Aaliyah), "learn" (Molly), "interesting" (Kimberly), "think" (Kimberly and Phionex), "want to know why" (Kimberly), "wondering" (Kimberly), "because" with regard to comprehension (Phionex), "know" (Phionex), "thought" (Phionex), "reason" (Devontay), "figuring it out" (Jairo). For Devontay, who was still struggling to read well on his new, ambitious level, the certainty that reason underpins what he is reading gave him somewhere to start: "I am not quite sure what it is about, but it's not random things that it's talking about."

Additionally, the participants reflected on their reading experiences with both explicit references to imagination as well as implicit references to the use of this important faculty. For two participants, the line between what they read and what they imagine is occasionally blurry as they still tend to rely on hearing and seeing plot rather than reading it. Devontay said that "once I see it acted out I can understand it," and Brianna acknowledged that it required a great deal of effort to separate her memory of watching the movie *To Kill a Mockingbird* from her reading of the text. However, the importance of imagination was dominant throughout all three data collections. The concept of imagination was explicitly addressed as part of the reading

process with words and phrases such as "imagine" (Aidan, Jairo, and three times by Aaliyah) and "picture" (Brianna and twice by Kimberly). Arianna directly linked the "creative freedom" she was allowed in a memorable English class with her reading and writing improvement, and Aaliyah moved smoothly from imagination to cognition as she read the passage, stating that "these sentences make you feel like – they make you *think.*" To conclude, both cognitive and imaginative engagement form the basis of reading improvement for readers like Arianna, who said that she "read from the novel in a much more uh deep and involved way instead of just what's on the page."

The third subtheme in the theme category of Reading as Confluence is reciprocal improvement, meaning that these participants connected their ambitious gains as readers with growth in other areas of their lives, which then again fed more reading growth in a circle of improvement. Aidan and Arianna credited becoming a better reader with significant improvement in their writing, while writing fed reading for Jennifer, who "wrote a short story that reminded [her father] of uhm Russian literature," which she soon pursued and conquered. A similar reciprocal relationship existed for NaTalia, who saw that her ever-widening interests drove more and better reading. Other areas of life, outside of reading and writing, also improved for these participants. Molly became more "independent," which helped her reading improve even more, and Aidan grew in "confidence," in "everything," and "in just about every other aspect" of life. Brianna shared that her reading improvement has helped her to continue "improving her everyday life," and that "improving every little thing in your life," including reading, "will help you along the way." Aaliyah said that her father's attitude toward the importance of reading included the goal of making her better also at reading life "situations."

Next, another way that these participants experienced Reading as Confluence was through the explored relationship between reading and self-awareness and identity formation. First, reading was seen by some participants as central to their identity, from Aidan's comment that reading is "just what I do" to NaTalia's statement that "reading for me took over my whole life...it ended up being my whole life, it took over." For Kimberly, assertion of her love of reading was an important step in becoming her own person during the difficult middle school years: "I'm gonna do my own thing, I'm gonna be who I am, I'm not gonna try to just be who everybody want me to be. So, I got back into reading." Jennifer experienced a similar event in middle school when the removal of a points-earning reward system actually spurred her to greater reading, relying not on external rewards but on an internal desire to develop a sense of self. However, two participants expressed a movement away from seeing reading as central to their identity, even in an interview about reading improvement. When asked how she wanted to be remembered as a reader, Brianna said, "Just remember me as *me*," and Phionex deflected on the importance of reading to him, shifting the focus from identity to behavior: "It's just something I do. That's all." Perhaps this decentralization of his reading identity was linked to his current life satisfaction by his saying, "Honestly, books were better than life, but now life is better than books right now."

Other participants saw reading as a part of their lives that informed their identity and increased their self-awareness. Aidan said that when he reads, he "see[s] what I am doing" and that it makes him "aware of your own processes," and Molly said she increased her reading at one point in her life to "learn more about myself." For Arianna, however, a particular reading experience provided a powerful sense of identity. When reading *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, she responded strongly to the description of Janie's hair and her internal confidence that had

developed by the time she wore her hair down in long ropes. Arianna said, "like as a black woman I feel I would like to have that kind of natural hair" and "I just really identified with how she felt, so like, like righteous in her skin, and I appreciated that." For at least one participant, reading also provided opportunities for assumptions to be challenged. While Aaliyah asserted that the reading observation passage "makes you reflect on yourself," many participants responded with initial uncertainty to the role that race played in the reading observation text. Jennifer was just beginning to confront her initial assumptions during the data collection, and both her self-talk and her reading observation debrief reflected this challenge. She tentatively wondered to herself, "maybe whites were only supposed to identify with the book?"

Two participants discovered community and corresponding distinction in books: Devontay, who identified with those who had been disenfranchised by saying "they've been through it also" and Jairo, who was drawn to very idiosyncratic books that were "a steampunk kind of thing" that was "not – hard to read ... to me anyways," indicating that he is different from many other readers by ability and interest, allowing him to differentiate his identity. For several other participants, however, their community identities powerfully informed their reading. Aaliyah drew on her identity in the black community to give context to the reading observation passage, saying in her self-talk, "the black community, what I know about it, ... in the black community you're not allowed, it's not, not, uh, encouraged to become like an author." Arianna drew on her knowledge of the community in the South, where she had lived most of her life, and said she would like to read more of "Southern Nights" "especially since we are – in the *South*" and it "relates to things we probably witness here."

Another aspect of the participants' lived experiences as improving readers that contains an element of confluence is the retrieval of previous experiences to inform current reading, and

the expectation that what they read now will help them understand something else later on. For some participants, specific texts emerged as touchpoints for understanding an unfamiliar text: *Tarzan* (Aidan said he "see[s] that in everything), *Oliver Twist* (Aidan), *Godzilla* (NaTalia), *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (NaTalia), and *The Color Purple* (NaTalia). Phionex made very specific connections in his self-talk between the reading observation passage and his own reading experiences, saying that "words would be my *katana*," replacing a word from the passage (*weapon*) with his specialized vocabulary. Others associated text types and school experiences: Jennifer associated the reading observation passage with a type of short-passage exercise she was familiar with ("Cold Reads"), and Molly connected to a recent lesson in rhetorical appeals as she attempted to apply that lens to a fiction passage as well as her knowledge of history. Arianna, too, referenced her social and historical context knowledge while Devontay suggested a less specific but still valuable relationship to him between what he had read before and what he was discussing. Sally suggested a spiraling relationship with text when she said, "I would have no idea what that meant, I actually *get* now." Perhaps Aaliyah best expressed this phenomenon: "You just read something and you see it in everything that you see."

The most prevalent subtheme in this category of confluence was the participants' expression of the experience of flow, or being fully immersed in the process of reading, while both talking about reading and during the reading observation. First, participants relied on the language of motion and movement to describe reading. NaTalia "started reading books" and "just kept on going," Aidan "moved on," Devontay remembered "the first step I took into like actually *reading*," Sally can "fly through some books," and Jennifer "took off in high school." While this language pattern that emerged through analysis is informative, it just begins to suggest a deeper pattern of flow or confluence. Another way that participants experienced flow

was in their expression of how they discover wholeness in printed texts. Several participants relied on visual imagery to communicate this aspect of their experience. For some participants, it is a thrilling miracle: "You can see things coming together in front of your eyes before it actually comes together" (Aaliyah) For others it is a methodical process of assimilation: Jennifer discussed her process with the word "connect," and Arianna used the words "connect" and "string together" to explain how she "[finds] the pieces that make sense to you so you can make sense of the rest of it" because she wants "to look at the bigger picture on a smaller scale." For others, it is a slow process that they, too, "see": during the reading observation debrief, Devontay continued to struggle and say that he was "lost," but while he discussed the passage with the researcher, he said, "I see it now – I think," and then "everything ties in now." Aidan also expressed understanding of the integral relationship between writer's style and meaning as well as the cohesiveness of method and meaning in well-crafted prose by using words of confluence with phrases like "the whole thing as a whole" and "work together."

Most significantly, however, this aspect of confluence that the participants associated with reading was described or defined with words and phrases like "absorb" (Aidan and Jennifer), "mesh" (Molly), "flow**"** (Phionex and Brianna), "engrossed" (Kimberly), "go along with" (Brianna), and "get into" (Brianna and Aaliyah). This sense of flow was so strong for Brianna that it transports her to "like a different place – it takes you to a different place" that she describes as "peaceful." Aaliyah, too, utilized the word "peace" when describing her personal response to the sensation of ebb and flow that she experiences as a reader who "can pull back from it and reflect on the situation then go back into it." The immersive experience of "flow," for Phionex, was also transportive as he recounted an incident in his reading story artifact: "I had wrapped myself in my blankets at home at night and I just sat down in front of the light and I just

started reading....I didn't realize where the night went as I was reading ... and I looked up and it was morning." Most powerfully, for Phionex, a significant reading experience crossed the boundary between reading and life, resulting in "a couple dreams about it." This same sort of merging of life and reading was expressed by Aaliyah as she reflected on her reading observation experience: "you were there instead of looking *in* on something, you were the person doing it," suggesting a moment of complete confluence with the text. Another powerful verbalization of the experience of flow was the word "resonance" (Aidan and Arianna), which communicated not only "absorbing" the words but also responding in a deep and intuitive manner that could only be captured by analogical language that bridges the realms of music and reading. Last, Aidan offered an astute observation that suggests his understanding that as a reader he steps into the flow of a text, but there are two "streams" – the reading and the text, which he recognizes "doesn't stop when you stop reading it, it keeps going."

There were two unexpected themes that emerged from the analysis of the data: the power of readers' experiences in middle school, and the persistent expectation that *reading* is narrative. With regard to the unexpected theme of middle school, 10 of the 12 participants mentioned a text or an experience from middle school, particularly in the story chart artifact portion of the data collection, even though the prompt specifically asked them to consider how they became a better reader during high school. With regard to the persistent expectation that *reading* is only narrative, only two participants mentioned "hard" texts that were not stories, and all of the school-assigned "hard" texts that participants chose to discuss were narratives. Sally's comments, which she made as a digression, captured this unexpected aspect of this phenomenon:

> Yeah, it's weird to like – you only think of like *reading* as a story, it's not so much as
> sitting down and reading a textbook but – I don't know I feel like they coordinate, they

correspond... correlate – that's weird because I don't know, I don't think about reading my science textbooks. – There is definitely science research that is interesting to read or there are even books on the research that people did like discoveries and I think that's cool because it is written – to be *read*, not to learn off of, I feel like.

Summary

The findings for each research question are summarized below. For Research Question 1: "What influences have impacted the lived experiences of these improving readers?," the influences included varying degrees of self-awareness of and responses to improvement; an understanding of reading as a phenomenon of associations (delineates texts and relies on imagery and strong positive connotation) and actions (connections/parts and wholes; process or processing, specifically as distinct from decoding; skill; immersion; and extension of self); self-selecting texts and persisting with teacher-assigned texts; experiencing uneasiness, confusion, or confidence while reading a challenging text; experiencing a shift in identity; expanding the idea of the nature of reading; seeing improvement as a result of effort and/ or competitiveness of readers, nurture and skill of teachers, increasing complexity of texts, climate of reading communities, increased frequency and quantity of reading, and individual maturation of readers; acknowledging that other adolescent readers might benefit from improved school contexts, personal contexts, and the larger social and cultural contexts; exhibiting general academic improvement and exhibiting agency in choosing texts, awareness of the impact of personal effort and choice, acknowledgement of the importance of flexible thinking (barriers and shifts), and confidence and courage; and benefitting from significant peer and family relationships. For Research Question 2: "What barriers to reading improvement existed for these students?," the barriers to comprehension of challenging texts included unfamiliar frame of reference, complex

narrative structure, and sophisticated writer's style (including vocabulary and techniques such as imagery). The participants also identified what they believed may be barriers for other adolescent readers, including lack of reader-text match regarding interest, lack of motivation to improve on the students' part, narrow choices of texts in school, and unintended outcomes of tracking and differences in teacher quality. For Research Question 3: "What high school-related reading experiences, if any, hold meaning for adolescent readers?," the participants identified these experiences as pertinent to their reading improvement: participation in advanced-level coursework, involvement with highly qualified and helpful English teachers, immersion in impactful instructional activities, and opportunities to engage their individual points of view. They also indicated that they synthesized many strategies that they had been exposed to, including using context clues; employing text features; drawing on outside resources; rereading, skipping, chunking, and varying reading pace; and utilizing mindfulness, intentional focus, or logic. For Research Question 4 "What characteristics are shared among adolescent readers who have experienced better-than-expected growth?," participant responses were organized into two categories: reading processes and shared characteristics or traits. The processes that these readers utilized included engaging in self-talk, concentrating time and attention on more challenging segments of text, exhibiting ease with printed text conventions, utilizing personalized reading processes, and experiencing revelation. The shared traits or characteristics include linking a landscape to reading, valuing progress, networking for assistance, expressing empathy, experiencing joy, manifesting agency, and speaking the language of learning.

Four themes emerged in this study. Reading as Provocation reflects participants' experience with reading as a stimulus for cognitive flexibility and for shifting points of view about themselves, the text they were reading, or the world in which they live. Reading as

Displacement acknowledges the participants' lived experiences of displacement, both as a response to displacement and as a factor that creates or exacerbates displacement. Reading as Relationship expresses the centrality of reading in these adolescent readers' relationships with adult readers in their educational communities, with peers, and with their families. Reading as Confluence reflects the fully integrative experience of becoming a better reader for these participants, including immediacy of the text, cognitive and imaginative engagement, reciprocal improvement, self-awareness and identity assertion, retrieval of previous experiences to inform reading, and the experience of flow.

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CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the experience of improvement in reading comprehension for adolescent readers who have made gains greater than what might be predicted based on previous growth in reading comprehension measures. Semi-structured interview questions, an artifact, and a reading observation provided relevant data from 12 participants. Chall's Reading Stage Scheme provided the conceptual frame, and new criticism, transactional reader response theory, and social constructivism served as the theoretical frames. The research questions included the following: What influences have impacted the lived experiences of these improving readers? What barriers to reading improvement existed for these students? What high school-related reading experiences, if any, hold meaning for adolescent readers? What characteristics are shared among adolescent readers who have experienced better-than-expected growth?

This chapter contains a summary of findings, discussion of the findings regarding the conceptual frame and the theoretical frames, discussion of the findings regarding the relevant literature, implications of the study for a variety of stakeholders, an outline of the delimitations and limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

This study revealed many aspects of the lived experiences of these adolescent readers who made ambitious gains while in high school. Influences and outcomes for these participants included varying degrees of self-awareness of and responses to improvement and an understanding of reading as a phenomenon of associations (delineates texts and relies on imagery and strong positive connotation) and actions (connections/parts and wholes; process or

processing, specifically as distinct from decoding; skill; immersion; and extension of self). They also asserted the value of self-selecting texts and persisting with teacher-assigned texts, and they reported experiencing uneasiness, confusion, or confidence while reading a challenging text. They also experienced a shift in identity as their reading improved, and for them, their idea of the nature of reading expanded. They also saw improvement as a result of many different factors, including their own effort and/ or competitiveness, the nurture and skill of teachers, the increasing complexity of texts, the supportive climate of their reading communities, the increased frequency and quantity of reading, and their own individual maturation as readers.

While they reported few barriers to improvement in general, they did acknowledge that other adolescent readers might benefit from many aspects that aided their development, including the following: being embedded in improved school contexts, personal contexts, and the larger social and cultural contexts; being invested in general academic improvement; exhibiting agency in choosing texts; being aware of the impact of personal effort and choice; acknowledging the importance of flexible thinking (overcoming barriers and experiencing shifts); displaying effort with confidence and courage; and seeking to benefit from significant peer and family relationships.

When they did, however, experience barriers to comprehension when reading challenging texts, the barriers consisted of unfamiliar frame of reference, complex narrative structure, and sophisticated writer's style (including vocabulary and techniques such as imagery). The participants identified what they believed may be barriers for other adolescent readers, including lack of reader-text match regarding interest, lack of motivation to improve on the students' part, narrow choices of texts in school, and unintended outcomes of tracking and differences in teacher quality. They identified several high school-related experiences as pertinent to their

reading improvement: participation in advanced-level coursework, involvement with highly qualified and helpful English teachers, immersion in impactful instructional activities, and opportunities to engage their individual points of view. They indicated that they synthesized many strategies that they had been exposed to. These participants utilized several significant reading processes, including engaging in self-talk, concentrating time and attention on more challenging segments of text, exhibiting ease with printed text conventions, utilizing personalized reading processes, and experiencing revelation. They shared traits or characteristics including linking a landscape to reading, valuing progress, networking for assistance, expressing empathy, experiencing joy, manifesting agency, and speaking the language of learning. Four themes that emerged in this study include the following: Reading as Provocation, Reading as Displacement, Reading as Relationship, and Reading as Confluence.

Discussion

The relationships among the findings of this study and the conceptual and theoretical frameworks as well as among the findings of this study and previous empirical research are rich and dense. First, findings that corroborate and confirm Chall's (1983) reading stage scheme will be presented, followed by findings that extend or diverge from this conceptual framework. Second, findings that corroborate and confirm the theoretical frameworks of new criticism, Rosenblatt's transactional reader response theory, and Vygotsky's social constructivism will be presented, followed by findings that extend or diverge from these theoretical frameworks and ways in which this study sheds new light on these existing theories. Third, findings that corroborate and confirm previous research on adolescent reading improvement will be presented, followed by findings that diverge or extend these studies. Last, potentially new contributions to the field of adolescent reading improvement gleaned from this study will be explored.

Chall's Reading Stage Scheme

This section will present the data collected from participants and analyzed in this study, as well as the themes that emerged, that provided strong confirmation of the high school reading stages, of utilization of coping mechanisms from earlier stages when readers were confronted with texts that pushed them beyond their current accomplishment, and of experiences with the kinds of challenging, mature texts that Chall identifies as critical to adolescent reading development.

The participants in this study presented persistent evidence of development in harmony with Chall's (1983) reading stage scheme, both in their reading processes and in their discussion of the reading text and of their experiences as readers. Chall's scheme is hierarchal and developmental, being based on Piaget's ideas of cognitive development which acknowledge that growth in thinking occurs due to biological and environmental factors. Chall offered ages associated with each stage with the acknowledgement that they were offered as ranges associated with whole-child development, not targets to be hit on birthdays (Chall, 1983). All 12 participants exhibited evidence of Stage 4 (Multiple Viewpoints), which Chall associated with high school, and 10 exhibited at least one characteristic of readers approaching or operating at Stage 5 (Construction and Reconstruction: A Worldview), which Chall and others associated with reading growth often experienced as college students and young adults continue to mature as readers.

Particularly of interest in understanding the reading growth of these adolescents is Chall's (1983) Reading to Learn: High School. Stage 4, or Multiple Viewpoints (ages 14 to 18), is characterized by the reader's ability to process new concepts and facts with those gathered in previous reading experiences and to seek new relationships among ideas. Also, developing

adolescent readers at this stage read, often independently, texts that invite them to wrestle with new points of view and with increasingly complicated concepts. Last, readers at this stage may react skeptically when they do indeed encounter new points of view, and they may also experience a sense of ambiguity as their previous ideas of certainty are tested (Chall, 1983) and as they make allowances for the "rightness of multiplicity" (Perry, 1970, p. 210). Evidence of these three categories of traits is persistent throughout the data collections of all participants.

First, readers in Stage 4 join new concepts and facts with those gathered in previous reading experiences, and they seek new relationships among ideas from their readings. Kimberly, Sally, and Aidan provided examples of this desire to synthesize abstractions while discussing their reading experiences. Kimberly, who expressed six Stage 4 comments out of a total of 13 analyzed statements, reported struggling to reconcile her previous notion that humans are intrinsically good with what she had previously read in nonfiction, Holocaust texts: "I thought people were supposed to be good. And I was like, well, I guess not" [small laugh]. Sally, who expressed four Stage 4 comments out of a total of nine analyzed statements, strategically attempted to retrieve and synthesize information from prior reading experiences to make sense of the reading observation text. In the debrief of the passage, she chose the pork and beans as the "strangest detail" and approached meaning making from a socio-historical perspective, connecting to her prior concepts of author's craft and intent:

> The pork and beans thing is weird, that's like a weird comment, like something he
> [author James Baldwin] threw in there, I think it's more of a – to show the time because
> he doesn't have a stove so he's putting it under hot water? Is that what he's doing?
> Aidan, who expressed six Stage 4 comments out of a total of 16 analyzed statements,

expressed a richer prior knowledge context for placing the passage in the reading observation

debrief. He expressed a similarity between Baldwin's revelatory experience while reading

Mencken's *A Book of Prefaces* with his own experience reading work by Martin Luther King Jr.,

which "makes me view the things around me a little differently, it makes me appreciate things as

they are and also kind of aspire for certain things to be better." Baldwin's startled response to

Mencken's critique of American culture seemed to resonate with ideas of justice, hope, and

reform that Aidan had encountered in King's speeches and letters, which indicates a complex

web of rich relationships among old and new concepts as yet unresolved for Aidan. Additionally,

it is noteworthy regarding Chall's Stage 4 that Aidan did not rely on his racial and geographic

similarity to Baldwin as revealed in the text (black and Southern, respectively), which may have

suggested the egocentrism of Reading Stage 3, but instead he relied on prior reading experiences

to provide a basis for synthesizing new ideas within an existing frame.

Second, Stage 4 readers respond to texts that invite them to wrestle with new points of

view and with increasingly complicated concepts. Devontay, who expressed the fewest Stage 4

comments (three out of 17 total analyzed statements), connected the Reading Observation text by

James Baldwin to his prior reading experience with Elie Wiesel's *Night*, which invited him to

begin wrestling with a new point of view: "I mean, I liked it [*Night*] but I didn't like what was

going on it," and "I didn't like it – it kinda made me mad." His tentative language and difficulty

expressing his response to the horrors of the Holocaust so skillfully expressed by Wiesel

suggested that he is just beginning to see reading as a portal to new, rich, and sometimes difficult

points of view. Devontay did, however, make an insightful comment when asked what he did

when he read a challenging text that included unfamiliar words: "I can still overall figure out

what it means but I might not like it," which is an indicator of the Stage 4 reader's willingness to

step beyond egocentric understandings and established boundaries of taste. Brianna expressed

only five Stage 4 comments, but these five were 50% of her comments related to reading stage. She, too, had begun wrestling with multiple viewpoints as presented in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. When asked why she "liked" that novel, she said, "It was really cuz I was still trying to wrap my mind around why anybody would do that kind of stuff?," and she said that one of the ways that she persists through reading challenges by "try[ing] to put myself into the place, like I *was* that person." Even though neither Devontay not Brianna self-selected either of the texts they discussed with relation to multiple viewpoints, they were certainly moving toward grappling with multiple viewpoints through texts assigned to them in school.

Other participants identified self-selected texts as the impetus for considering the implications of new perspectives. Arianna, who expressed six Stage 4 comments out of a total of 32 analyzed statements, specifically credited her reading improvement to exposure to texts from multiple points of view: "I think that's why I have gotten to be a better reader because I've been able to connect a lot more from other perspectives." Jairo, who expressed three Stage 4 comments out of a total of eight analyzed statements, also credited his own reading improvement to that fact that he independently "just read[s] more complex things," which for him he eventually identified as the conflict in his story chart artifact as the movement "from reading these really popular, easy books to the obscure books that are not so easy to understand" which, for him, are books like *Monster Blood Tattoo* that combine sophisticated concepts of mythology, history, and linguistics.

Additionally, several participants reported self-selecting complex texts with increasingly complicated concepts: NaTalia and Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, Kimberly and the nature of greatness as revealed in an art history book on Vincent van Gogh, and Jennifer and her steady exposure to "the classics" with rich thematic and stylistic elements. For Phionex, who

expressed nine Stage 4 comments out of a total of 26 analyzed statements, the increased point-of-view complexity in his independent reading was reflected both in genre and subject as he moved from exclusively choosing novels to exploring nonfiction forms, including books that stretched his interests and conceptual base and topics such as spirituality and the world outside his traditional Hindu culture. "I'm ready for that now that I am expanding my horizons to some things I used to be uncomfortable with," he said, "and now I'm extremely – not *comfortable* but I'm OK with," suggesting an appreciation of multiple points of view and increasingly complex texts as he moves into subject farther removed from his own life experience and interests.

Third, Stage 4 readers often resort to skepticism when they encounter new points of view, and they may also experience a sense of ambiguity as their previous ideas of certainty are tested (Chall, 1983) and as they make allowances for the "rightness of multiplicity" (Perry, 1970, p. 210). Jennifer, who expressed 13 Stage 4 statements out of 16 analyzed statements, also acknowledged that she appreciates multiple points of view when she reads but responds skeptically (and rightly so, for some texts that she mentioned). Using tentative language, including *maybe* and *might*, she reports "enjoy[ing] books that uhm, that make you believe that maybe the protagonist is the crazy one but you realize it might not be him who's the crazy person – and so it shifts your perspective."

For Molly, who expressed six Stage 4 comments out of a total of nine analyzed statements, interacting with multiple points of view when reading is a path to personal growth, but the nature of that growth is still uncertain to her, an uncertainty expressed both in what she said and well as in how she said it:

It [reading books] brings new perspectives to something you may have never thought of

before, and it's not ... because you can have a certain thought about one thing and then

find something that is intriguing and interesting that persuades you to think in a different light, and I think that is amazing how it can bring up something that you never about before – or if it relates back to your own experiences as a human being.

The tangled syntax, second-person verb tense, indefinite pronouns, hyperbolic adjectives, and abstractions without examples all suggest a distance and vagueness about the nature of that growth.

Aaliyah, who expressed 16 Stage 4 comments out of a total of 34 analyzed statements, expressed a patience toward and appreciation of this aspect of Stage 4 when explaining how she and her friends approach talking about a book they have all read. She likes to

[form] my own judgment about it but still being open to hearing what other people thought about it – discussing, like having, like me and my friend read like the same book? and then discuss it with them because they'll almost 90% of the time say something completely different than what I thought, so I'm always open to hearing what everybody has to say and like listening to it and evaluating it and saying, ooh, I see that, I see where they are looking at that, and that is kind of more proven than my idea of things.

Even though she used the word *evaluate* in her comments, she stopped short of reporting that she did actually determine the value of each person's interpretation. Instead, she reported deferring to her friends' perspective, confirming the "rightness of multiplicity" that characterizes Stage 4 responses. Also, when Aaliyah was explaining how she became a better reader in high school, she stated that one of her influential teachers asked questions which students

really have to think about before you answer, it isn't something you see on the page, it's something you look at and you think about, and you still think about weeks afterwards, thinking, well – that could be this, or it could be that.

These kinds of questions elicited responses that confirm Chall's "rightness of multiplicity" (Perry, 1970, p. 210) because "it's more how you personally look at literature, look at a set of words and interpret it in a way that's completely different from the person next to you." Implicit in this response is an understanding not only of the necessity of encountering multiple viewpoints but also of the impact of prodding adolescents to stretch, an essential element of any sort of development.

In clarifying the essential characteristics of readers at Stage 4, Chall (1983) offered an exemplar response to the question, "Is what you just read true?" in which readers at this stage typically express the inability to evaluate truth claims: "I don't know. One of the authors I read said it was true, the other said it was not. I think there may be no true answers on the subject" (Chall, 1983, p. 58). NaTalia, who expressed 20 Stage 4 comments out of a total of 23 analyzed statements, was squarely in this conundrum, with no expectation of it being resolved. She communicated her confusion on two levels, through her words and through paraverbal communication. For her as a reader, her parents' religious differences spurred her to investigate evolution and creationism independently. When asked a clarifying question in the interview about how reading functions in her life, she said this:

> NaTalia: Uh... I wrote a paper on Charles Darwin in middle school and then every
> project I did after that I always wrote another paper on him because my mom doesn't like
> church and she doesn't like God – she's a, an atheist, there it is, and Dad's a Church of
> God, no, yes, Church of God, so he's very religious and it makes you question which one
> is right. *I guess neither one of them is right, so....huh....* [italics added for emphasis]
> Researcher: So, you use reading to form your own opinion?

NaTalia: Too much controversy – to get the answers that I need. There so much

question in life still, they are still pushing books about evolution and whether or not it can

be true, based on the facts you get from the bible and they compare it to what they

actually get -- *dinosaurs aren't in the Bible but so much stuff can be interpreted to say*

that they were? – it's different... [italics added for emphasis] *[little laugh]*

NaTalia is not yet able to sift through various truth claims, as would be evident in Stage 5

readers, and her comments are a clear example of the ambiguity experienced by Stage 4 readers.

The density and persistence of these participants' experiences, traits, and processes confirm

Chall's (1983) high school Stage 4: Multiple Viewpoints.

Stage 5, or Constructing and Reconstructing: A Worldview (ages 18 and beyond), is

Chall's (1983) last stage, which not all readers attain (Chall, 1983) and is characterized by deep

prior knowledge; by flexibility of reading purposes and of levels (such as literal and symbolic);

by movement between and among analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of texts and ideas; and by

interpretation of abstractions. Readers operating at this stage also feel "entitled to knowledge"

(Chall, 1983, p. 51): they contribute new knowledge in conversations with texts and other

readers, and they boldly test ideas that they confront in texts, eventually rejecting or accepting

them after consideration. Ten of the 12 participants in this study exhibited at least one of these

characteristics (Devontay and NaTalia did not make any Stage 5 statements during the data

collection), and representative comments from each of the 10 participants will be presented as

evidence confirming the aspects of Stage 5.

Deep prior knowledge. Jairo, who expressed five Stage 5 comments out of a total of

eight analyzed statements, connected deep prior knowledge in more obscure and idiosyncratic

domains, such as steampunk as an amalgamation of Victorian and futuristic elements and

medieval story structures such as the quest. For Arianna, who expressed 26 Stage 5 comments out of a total of 32 analyzed statements, her deep prior knowledge revolved around sophisticated abstractions that she encountered through family conversations, such as embody in the phenomenological sense, feminism in the socio-historical sense, and privilege in the critical race theory sense.

Flexibility of reading purposes and levels. These participants expressed that they must adjust as readers to match the author's purpose and their own purposes as readers. Aidan (who expressed nine Stage 5 comments out of a total of 16 analyzed statements) and Phionex (who expressed 16 Stage 5 comments out of a total of 26 analyzed statements) both defined reading by contrasting their approaches to reading for information or for entertainment. Sally, who expressed three Stage 5 comments out of a total of nine analyzed statements, contrasted her approaches to comprehending texts of varying complexity, such as "Shakespeare and stuff like that" and the books that are much less demanding in terms of style and content: "you can't just, like when I'm reading for fun, you can't just mindlessly read it [Shakespeare], yeah, you have to actually focus." Jennifer, who expressed three Stage 5 comments out of a total of 16 analyzed statements, articulated an awareness of moving among and between levels of complexity "from what we do at school" and the passage for the reading observation, which she characterized as "a step back" because "it was very, very straightforward as a text." Arianna noted both the necessity of developing this flexibility of purpose and level embedded in the curriculum as she has experienced it. When she was "in middle school we would read things for a really direct purpose, like because of this, because of this, and in high school it's been more like the question is always the question, more open ended." She continued as she discussed a significant experience her freshman year that reflects her ability to reflect metacognitively on moving

among varying levels of reading: "We were having to switch among handling things more figuratively like what could the author be saying and then like direct what is the author saying."

Movement between and among analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of texts and ideas. Arianna and Molly (who expressed three Stage 5 comments out of a total of nine analyzed statements) both credited what they have read with improving their own writing style, synthesizing self-chosen mentor texts into their work. Additionally, Arianna captured her desire to gather these thinking processes together: "I want to look at the bigger picture or on a smaller scale, I've had to understand like why things in a text work the way they do," suggesting that her expectation of herself as a reader has grown to include analysis, synthesis, and evaluation, the three skills that Chall (1983) identified as critical for a Stage 5 reader. Additionally, several of these improving adolescent readers exhibited the "audacity" that Chall associated with Stage 5, including Molly who moved smoothly from analysis of literary style, synthesis of reading experiences and reading identity, and evaluation of writer's style in her gentle criticism of Hardy's imagery ("I like imagery, but to the extent that he did imagery, it like, it was a little bit much for me"). Phionex, too, critiqued the style of a great writer, acknowledging his limitations as a reader while debriefing his reading observation. While he intuited that there must be a link between the style and the meaning, he was unable to mine it and qualified the lengthy list of author names in the passage, eventually moving from analysis to evaluation, asserting that Baldwin used "an extreme list – a little excessive." This evaluative comment is grounded in Phionex's inability to decode and comprehend the names in the lengthy list, making this comment interesting regarding reader movement from Stage 4 to Stage 5.

Interpretation of abstractions. In the reading observation debrief, Arianna correctly interpreted the abstract implications of the concrete detail of the can of pork and beans as an

indicator not just of economic situation, which many participants suggested, but as a detail that suggests "a sense of inferiority in the sense that he's eating pork and beans at a sink." Arianna also offered an interpretation of the irony in the passage unprompted (prior to the researcher's question that used that term), ultimately understanding that the speaker is "battling with kind of pleasing himself without disrespecting his, his – race."

Entitlement to knowledge. Kimberly clearly and forcefully communicated her inherent right to the knowledge that is inside books when she explained why she persevered in reading a challenging text: "People who do extraordinary things? like – they do great at something – I want to know why." Phionex spoke to the powerful outcomes of reading, which had given him "the whole spectrum of knowledge," which he clearly felt belongs to him, whether it is knowledge in "a random Microsoft book" or important ideas in *The Great Gatsby*.

Contribution of new knowledge. Arianna explicitly expressed her ability to contribute new knowledge to the conversation with a text and with readers. When recounting her experience on the essay portion of the Advanced Placement Literature and Composition Exam as part of her reading story artifact, she used imagery of transformation to characterize her personal power in offering her voice:

> That was some of the best writing I have ever done in my life – when I walked out I was like I felt like I had shed a whole new layer of skin. I just put some really nice things in my paper [laughs] so I was really happy I had worked that hard all year and was able to pull it off at the end, that I had gotten it and everything clicked into place.

Confronting, testing, and evaluating ideas. The participants in this study who exhibited this Stage 5 aspect did so as part of their rereading strategy or in reconsidering their first impressions of the passage in the debrief. Brianna, who expressed two Stage 5 comments out of a

total of 10 analyzed statements, is just beginning to approach this stage in Chall's (1983) scheme

as revealed in her strategic rereading and self-correcting process during her reading observation.

In her debrief she recounted what she had read and was compelled to confront an initial

misunderstanding regarding the context of the passage. She also chose the pork and beans as the

"strangest detail," but when she began discussing it, she said this: "It was kinda good but sorta

funny – pork and beans....[low laughter] -- but – oh, now I get it – I was going too fast – it says,

'in my rented room ...'" She was ultimately unable to articulate what new understanding she

achieved.

Other participants exhibited stronger Stage 5 aspects. Aaliyah (who expressed 18 Stage 5

comments out of a total of 34 analyzed statements) offered a clear example of her ability to test

her ideas against a text to either confirm or correct her thinking. Once she realized that the

speaker was "a person of color, presumably black," pieces of meaning locked into place for her.

She traced her line of thinking in her reading observation self-talk:

> Like it compl – like I was honestly imagining somebody who was white just because a lot
>
> of the times in popular books the main character is white – but this changes like the way,
>
> the tone, the way you read it, the type of person who is like the narrator, it completely
>
> changes everything.... That's cool.

The incomplete constructions, the interrupted sentences, and the list of aspects of meaning that

she had to reconsider trace the jagged journey from her initial idea about race and identity, and

therefore context and meaning. She fleshed out the significance of this reading moment in her

debrief:

> ...and like there's a sentence that says, "I got my imagination beat out of me" kind of
>
> thing? and he – it starts to make sense because in the black community, what I know

about it, was like, whoa, so I had to reread it when I got to the last passage to think

about it in a different way.

When asked about her typical reading process in situations like this, she said, "I read it, then I reread things and I go back and forth, so I will completely understand what's happening." This sort of reciprocity between reader and text goes beyond simply rereading for clearer comprehension and instead reflects the heart of Chall's (1983) Stage 5.

Clearly, the adolescent readers in this study confirm Chall's (1983) reading scheme for high school and beyond. They all made ambitious gains in reading comprehension while in high school and were on grade-level or above as readers. From Devontay to Arianna, the presence of Stage 4 aspects is consistently present in the interactions of all the participants through all three data collections. Interestingly, some readers who were on grade level or slightly above exhibited more traits associated with Chall's earlier learning-to-read stages that precede high school. For example, 14 out of 17 analyzed comments of Devontay – who was a 15-year-old sophomore with a 1.6 GPA in his school's least academically challenging curriculum – used and reflected on coping strategies associated with pre-high school reading stages. His transcript reflected only three analyzed comments at Stage 4. On the other end of the spectrum of development is Arianna, who was an 18-year-old senior with a 3.96 (on a 4-point scale) GPA in her school's most academically challenging curriculum. Her transcript reflected 26 Stage 5 comments and six Stage 4 comments, with no comments reflecting earlier learning-to-read coping strategies. Yet, as Chall allows, reading stage development is not determined by age. For example, Aaliyah was a 15-year-old sophomore with a 3.4 GPA in her school's most academically challenging curriculum. Her transcript reflected 16 Stage 4 comments and 18 Stage 5 comments, with no comments reflecting earlier learning-to-read coping strategies.

At the same time, Chall's (1983) stage theory asserts a view of reading growth that is hierarchal and progressive. The transcript of one participant in particular, when considered as a micro-portrait of an adolescent reader, captures the essence of a developmentally based understanding of reading growth. The experiences that Aaliyah recalled and shared regarding her growth as a reader, not just in high school but throughout her life, manifest Chall's scheme.

Additionally, these participants exhibited evidence of reverting to earlier developmental reading stages when presented with challenging portions of text in the reading observation, which is consistent with Chall's (1983) idea that these earlier "learning to read" skills can function as coping mechanisms. Decoding instead of anticipating a word (Stage 1), reading to corroborate previously repeated structures (Stage 2), automatically recognizing many age-appropriate words (Stage 2), exchanging silent reading for watching and listening as a more efficient way to collect information (Stage 3), and moving from egocentric reading purposes (Stag 3A) to a wider conventional knowledge of the world (Stage 3B) lessen in their prevalence as readers grow and mature.

The reading observation self-talk or debrief of seven of the 12 participants exhibited use of these coping mechanisms. The list of unfamiliar authors in the reading observation passage stumped many participants, particularly evident as they attempted to phonetically decode unfamiliar names, revisiting Stage 2 strategies with varying degrees of success. Kimberly did not connect Tolstoy's name (which she eventually and awkwardly pronounced) with the book she said she wanted to read next, *War and Peace*, and Phionex attempted to phonetically pronounce most authors. Kimberly tried five authors' names with varying degrees of success then virtually gave up and instead skimmed to the end of the list. Molly struggled through the list, eventually misreading *Dostoevsky* as "Tchaikovsky" – then she giggled and recanted, saying, "Isn't

Tchaikovsky a music person?" relying on prior knowledge to help her self-correct, another aspect of Stage 3 readers. Regarding Stage 3 strategies, Brianna acknowledged the need for her peers to be offered "interesting books" although she herself reads widely and deeply, yet she is primarily driven to collect "knowledge" (a word she pronounced with a slightly humorous and self-mocking tone). Devontay also stated that he reads for "knowledge" and reads primarily fact-based nonfiction and some young adult fiction based on his interests, another characteristic of a Stage 3 reader. Devontay has also not yet exchanged a preference for watching and listening with more efficient silent reading as he finds it "a lot more helpful when somebody reads it aloud to me."

The younger and less mature readers – like Devontay (14 statements reflecting Stages 1-3), NaTalia (three statements reflecting Stages 1-3), and Brianna (two statements reflecting Stages 1-3 regarding to herself and one regarding her peers) – accounted for the majority of the reversions (19 of 26 total). It is also of note that these three participants were the only three that had not taken any advanced academic courses.

Last, regarding confirming Chall's (1983) reading scheme, these participants reported reading the kinds of texts and interactions with texts that Chall maintained as critical to the continued development of adolescent readers. Often the participants specifically linked their reading improvement to the types of texts that Chall expected to be components of a secondary school education, confirming not only the traits of these readers but also the process of reading development. Stage 4 is acquired, Chall stated, "through formal education – the assignments in the various school textbooks, original and other sources, and reference works in the physical, biological, and social sciences; through the reading of more mature fiction; and through the free reading of books, newspapers, and magazines," readings that require flexibility with "more than

one set of facts" (Chall, 1983, p. 23). Few participants mentioned textbooks readings, except for NaTalia who mentioned reading her literature anthology and history books. Many participants mentioned having recently read "free" independent texts that included nonfiction such as a coding book (Phionex) a van Gogh book (Kimberly), and books on Charles Darwin (NaTalia). Independently chosen sophisticated fiction was also mentioned consistently in the data collections, including titles such as *Brave New World* (Phionex), *The Color Purple* (NaTalia), *Jane Eyre* (Phionex), *The Bell Jar* (Arianna), *Fahrenheit 451* (Molly), and works by writers as diverse as Chekov and O'Conner (Jennifer). However, all participants mentioned at least one work of "more mature fiction" as part of their required curriculum. These texts included *Of Mice and Men, Julius Caesar, To Kill a Mockingbird, Lord of the Flies, The Great Gatsby, Catcher in the Rye, Macbeth, The Canterbury Tales,* and *Their Eyes Were Watching God.* Two participants, Brianna and Devontay, mentioned *Night* by Elie Wiesel, nonfiction included in the English II curriculum at Placid High School (pseudonym), as critical to their improvement as it required that they see the world differently after reading it.

Chall's (1983) scheme also asserted that challenging academic work that invites students to "grapple with multiplicity" (Chall 1983, p. 50-51), and the data collected from several participants confirms that this is still a relevant component of reading growth. Indeed, many participants directly linked their reading improvement to what was required of them after reading. The following activities were included in their comments: extended written responses, literary analysis essays, timed analysis of new readings, multiple viewpoint text analysis activities, student choice of texts, and Socratic seminars.

Additionally, the themes of this phenomenology primarily confirm Chall's (1983) scheme for high school. First, Reading as Provocation captures many of the aspects of reading

experiences that assist adolescent readers to transition to Stage 4: Multiple Viewpoints in that confronting shifting and multiple perspectives is critical to reading development. Additionally, the themes of Reading as Displacement, Reading as Relationship, and Reading as Confluence approach many of the essential aspects of Chall's Stage 5 Construction and Reconstruction: A Worldview in that they suggested the importance of synthesis and moving smoothly among text purposes and levels. However, Chall exclusively focused on readers themselves, but this study suggests that progress for these participants is often made in relationship with other readers.

New Criticism

Findings that corroborate and confirm, as well as extend or diverge from, the theoretical framework of new criticism will be considered as will ways in which this study sheds new light on contemporary applications of this theory. The primary tenets of this theory are that effective readers focus on the text and how the author creates meaning, not on their own personal response or on the motives of the writer. New criticism also asserts that written works vary in literary quality, which may indicate the necessity of different approaches, and that there is a range of interpretation of a text delineated by reason. This study confirmed several major aspects of this theory.

During the reading observation, the participants generally moved through personal responses and curiosity about the author's motive to grasp the intended meaning, often using phrases to that effect. Also, the fact that all participants referenced terminology of new criticism as they utilized the new criticism "close reading" approach when discussing texts illustrates that they have and are willing to use the tools of literary analysis and reading processes, from Devontay's "contact [context] clues" to Aidan's litany of devices in his self-talk. These participants also intuitively agreed with the assumption that some texts are more "literary" than

others and require different approaches. For example, most participants lightly dismissed young adult novels such as *Twilight* as less sophisticated (even though some reported enjoyment and self-discovery through this genre), and said that works like *The Mayor of Casterbridge, The Great Gatsby*, and *Julius Caesar* brought with them a different sort of pleasure and challenge. Last, these readers also worked within reasonable boundaries to come ever closer to the meaning of the passage in the reading observation, and reported the same sort of crooked march to meaning in other reading experiences. While in many classrooms, high school students confidently make unreasonable assertions that contradict the author's message (one classic misinterpretation is that Shakespeare's "mistress" in Sonnet 130, for example, must be one ugly girl, bless her heart), but these readers did not stray too far for too long from the author's meaning and all ultimately understood with accuracy and insight. The participants did, however, often utilize outside knowledge, not just knowledge of how texts work, to help discern what might and might not be reasonable. For example, several participants struggled to determine the relevance of race to the passage and therefore the overall meaning of the passage, so they reflected on the date and their own background knowledge about race expectations in the South in 1945 as shared in their self-talk. Others bounced their growing understanding against prior reading experiences, ranging from *Their Eyes Were Watching God* to the much more surprising *Godzilla* (which NaTalia quickly rejected as not helpful), which supports Brooks' idea that readers must abide by reasonable boundaries in order to interpret what they have read.

Overall, two themes offer confirmation of Brooks' new criticism: Reading as Provocation and Reading as Confluence. With regard to Reading as Provocation, these readers often associated genre and form knowledge with their comprehension. For example, Jennifer reflected on how satire works:

And I really like satire, too, like Joseph Heller and Kurt Vonnegut – it's really, I enjoy books that uhm, that make you believe that maybe the protagonist is the crazy one but you realize it might not be him who's the crazy person – and so it shifts your perspective . . . . It kind of flips everything on its end.

Her knowledge of genres and forms not only increased her enjoyment associated with reading but also helped her comprehend the passage from the reading observation, as noticing or deducing that it was narrative helped several participants as well. Also, the universal themes that are explored in the types of texts that Brooks promotes and the focus on developing a different regard for certain texts are both reflected in this theme, Reading as Provocation. Most participants had previously developed a sense that popular young adult novels were essentially different from the "hard" books that they chose to discuss in the interview. Also, the difficult themes that are offered in works of literary merit were a part of the experience of Reading as Provocation for several participants, captured eloquently by Kimberly when she said, "That [reading *Night*] just changed my perspective because I thought people were supposed to be good. And I was like, well, I guess not" [little laugh]. Second, the theme of Reading as Confluence also confirms new criticism's approach to texts as an effective for these adolescent readers. Participants often commented on the link between the style of the reading observation passage and its meaning, experiencing them as an integrative whole but also appreciating how the two fit together. For example, during the reading observation debrief, Aidan said this:

He's kind of writing in that same general style, so it's like he's imitating the thing that he's talking about – which is, I find that really weird-cool . . . . And like he's talking like he's on level with when he's writing it.

Overall the findings of this study confirm new criticism, but it also extends its application as the participants did not exclusively depend on their knowledge of forms and literary techniques. Although their knowledge was deep and wide as exhibited by the shared characteristic of speaking the language of learning, especially in the high-frequency group who used literary terminology with accuracy and ease, many participants combined their knowledge of text features with their (although sometimes slight) background knowledge, personal experience, or previous reading experiences to comprehend the reading observation passage more fully. This suggests that adolescent readers who are making ambitious gains continue to need knowledge of historical time periods and other bodies of knowledge, in addition to exposure to both reading and analyzing increasingly sophisticated literary texts, so that they can continue to grow as readers.

Rosenblatt's Transactional Reader Response Theory

Findings that primarily corroborate and confirm, and a few that extend or diverge from, the theoretical framework of Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional reader response theory will be considered, as will ways in which this study sheds new light on contemporary applications of this theory. Rosenblatt (1978) suggested that meaning is created by readers and that the construction of meaning is connected to a particular time in a reader's life. Rosenblatt (1978) also suggested that an effective stance toward a text allows the reader to focus on aesthetic understanding that transcends matters of taste. The self-talk and reading observation debrief for all participants revealed that meaning-making was a process of reading, trying on ideas, testing and confirming impressions, then often revising those initial ideas when summarizing the passage for the researcher. The idea that their experiences with texts were grounded in a particular time in their lives was confirmed by reports that what they comprehended, changed as they grew as well as

some participants' recollections of where they read a text and with whom they read. Several participants shared that they understood more of a challenging novel as they continued reading and discussing the work. Also, Rosenblatt's acknowledgement of the essential relationship between reading and writing as "stimulus and support to the other" was specifically and strongly reflected in the interviews and story chart artifacts of eight of the 12 participants, ranging from NaTalia's memory of writing and reflecting on individual sentences to Phionex's connection between the essays he had written in AP English and his new respect for challenging literature like *Brave New World*, which he would have previously dismissed.

The themes in this study primarily confirmed but also challenged and extended Rosenblatt's (1978) theory. Reading as Displacement does not relate to Rosenblatt's theory, but Reading as Provocation offers an effective way to understanding the process by which readers do indeed "construct" meaning – by encountering mindfully other perspectives about themselves and the text. Reading as Relationship confirms Rosenblatt's view that meaning is constructed within a total environment – where and when the reader is situated is a critical element of the reader's relationship with the text. These participants are situated in small social networks that connect them to their friends and families, and books flow between, functioning more centrally than simply texts to be read but as the essential fiber of relationships. Additionally, these participants confirmed Rosenblatt's emphasis on the importance of speech, especially "dialogue between teacher and students, and interchange among students [to] foster growth and cross-fertilization in both the reading and writing processes" (Rosenblatt, 1988, p. 39). Last, the theme of Reading as Confluence supports Rosenblatt's perspective that meaning-making is a process of flow, a "complex, nonlinear, [and] self-correcting" (Rosenblatt, 1988, p. 12) process is confirmed by this theme and supported by all participants' self-talk and debrief comments, and

by some participants' cursor movement as predominantly non-linear as a reflection of their process. Also, some of the participants in this study reflected the intuitive understanding of Rosenblatt's stances as revealed in this theme of Reading as Confluence as they moved along the continuum between efferent and aesthetic reading. These 12 adolescent readers confirmed in a multiplicity of means Rosenblatt's position that

> the aesthetic reader experiences, savors, the qualities of the structured ideas, situation, scenes, personalities, and emotions that are called forth, and participates in the tensions, conflicts, and resolutions as they unfold. The lived-through experience is felt to correspond to the text. (13)

However, with regard to ways in which this study challenges transactional reader response theory, Rosenblatt posits that "the 'meaning' does not reside ready-made in the text or in the reader but happens during the transaction between reader and text" (1978, p. 11), but the participants in this study continued to seek, not construct, meaning, albeit comprehension for all them was indeed a process. Participants' use of words like *absorb* and *resonate* when discussing their reading processes indicated that participants see meaning as something that emerges, not something they actively create. Most significantly, these adolescent readers who had made ambitious growth came to the same understanding of the meaning of the reading observation text; they did not offer competing interpretations nor did they continue to assert misunderstandings about what they had read as they engaged in self-talk and in the debrief with the researcher.

Another aspect of this study with regard to Rosenblatt's work is the force with which it reveals the misinterpretation and misapplication of Rosenblatt's theory. Several participants confirmed what Pantaleo (2013) found, that English teachers in particular continue to

misinterpret reader response theory in accepting all interpretations as equally valid. However, some also noted that this kind of freedom to assert their own point of view on a text – which, according to Chall (1983), may be a point of view "not for all time but for now" (p. 51) – was an important part of their reading story. This seems to be a stage, perhaps, that these developing readers move through on their way to more accurate – and more reasonable – interpretations.

Last, with regard to ways in which this study extends Rosenblatt's theory, all of these participants automatically assumed the aesthetic stance for the reading observation, which was certainly the more appropriate stance for the memoir by Baldwin. Yet they also primarily associated "reading" with aesthetic reading and self-reported that the texts they "read" were predominantly literary texts. Sally most eloquently struggled with a burgeoning realization during her interview that perhaps:

> Yeah, it's weird to like – you only think of like reading as a story, it's not so much as sitting down and reading a textbook but – I don't know, I feel like they coordinate, they correspond... correlate – that's weird because I don't know, I don't think about reading my science textbooks. – There is definitely science research that is interesting to read or there are even books on the research that people did like discoveries and I think that's cool because it is written – to be *read*, not to learn off of, I feel like.

This study extends Rosenblatt's theory as it suggests that the aesthetic stance is strongly associated with ambitious growth for adolescent readers.

Vygotsky's Social Constructivism

Findings that corroborate and confirm, as well as extend or diverge from, the theoretical framework of Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivism will be considered, as will ways in which this study sheds new light on contemporary applications of this theory. Participants gave

evidence that they both reflected culture in their responses to reading and created culture in their use of books to build community. They also moved in and around formal and informal settings that the associated with learning in their discussion of librarians, classrooms, and personal reading spaces. They also shared examples of what Vygotsky termed private or inner speech in their recordings of their self-talk. While it would be impossible to determine true inner speech, this research technique was the closest approximation possible. All but one participant shared synchronous self-talk, and all 12 referenced metacognitive processing of their ideas while completing the reading observation. Vygotsky (1978) suggested that this inner speech was the energy behind cognitive growth and often emerged when a reader is confronted with a challenging task, another aspect of this theory that was present in self-talk and cursor movement during the reading observation as well as in the debrief. Evidence of these, as well as social learning from a more experienced person, usually an adult, was also consistently present in the participants' interviews and story chart artifact.

However, the interaction with the more experienced person was in the sense of opportunities for self-correction than experiences of social constructivism. Analysis of their interactions with the researcher particularly in the reading observation debrief, as well as with their peers, classmates, and family members, revealed that the discussion of what they had read was a critical part of their reading process, similar to the way in which an inexperienced sailor will try one tack, then try another in order to catch the flow of the wind and water.

Three themes of this study primarily confirm this theory. First, Reading as Confluence harmonizes with the actual process of constructing knowledge, which is an ebb and flow, and ultimately a stream of knowledge that is available for the next task. Reading as Provocation suggests that inner speech, especially when a reader was confronted with a challenging task, was

not only present but necessary for understanding the passage in the reading observation. Most significant is the theme of Reading as Relationship in that it reflects Vygotsky's idea that more skilled "others," usually adults, are the primary bearers of culture and pass down the tools and knowledge of success. These participants shared stories of teachers and librarians, mothers and father, older siblings, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers with whom they read and learned to think about what they had read. Vygotsky (1978) also suggested that the primary tool of social connection is language, in this case more specifically texts that invited adolescent readers to co-construct knowledge with peers as well as they often ask friends for help, challenge each other's assumptions, and inspire each other to read more and more challenging books. While the theme of Reading as Displacement does not directly inform the application of this theory, it does shed insight into the collective experience of improving adolescent readers, reminding practitioners and theorists alike that their lives are characterized by the desire for "home" in a world in which they experience dislocation.

This study also challenges and extends Vygotsky's social constructivist theory in that meaning is not primarily *constructed* in social interactions; these participants viewed the meaning of a text as independent of themselves, and instead used language that suggests that they perceive that meaning not constructed but *ascertained*, which is a strong rejection of the heart of social constructivism however a rejection not of Vygotsky's theory but of some applications that have flowed from misunderstandings and misappropriations of that work.

Research on Adolescent Reading Improvement

Findings, represented by answers to this study's research questions and by themes, that corroborate and confirm previous research on adolescent reading improvement will be presented, followed by findings that diverge or extend these studies. The research questions were as

follows: What influences have impacted the lived experiences of these improving readers? What barriers to reading improvement existed for these students? In addition, what school-related reading experiences, if any, hold meaning for these readers? What characteristics are shared among adolescent readers who have experienced better-than-expected growth? The four themes were Reading as Provocation, Reading as Displacement, Reading as Relationship, and Reading as Confluence. The section below presents the synthesis of findings with prior research on adolescent reading improvement organized by themes that emerged in the literature review.

Reading Processes Necessary for Secondary Reading

This study confirmed the presence of Goldman's (2012) five active processes of successful adolescent readers: comprehension monitoring with utilization of multiple strategies, conceptual connectivity, generation of questions or explanations, use of logical links within the text, and dependence on their knowledge base, including structural features and vocabulary. This study also confirmed the power and strong presence of the ability for adolescent readers to visualize accurately and evocatively and to draw meaning inferences from what they have read (Fang, 2008). The participants in this study also reported exposure to instructional sequences that reflect Chall's (1983) scheme with regard to processes necessary for reading at the secondary level, including independent reading of high-quality popular literature (Arianna's *The Fault in our Stars*) and newspapers (Molly's online informational reading and subsequent interactions on Tumblr) that exposed them to new perspectives; systematic study of words (Sally's vocabulary notebook and Aidan's interest in Greek and Latin roots); writing assignments that require the consideration of multiple points of view (Arianna's literary research paper); and to read widely "beyond their immediate needs" (NaTalia's reading of Charles Darwin, Kimberly's van Gogh, Devontay's military).

Barriers to Continuous Reading Growth for Adolescents

This study does not directly confirm barriers to continuous growth as indicated in the literature since these readers were by definition successful, but it is of note that they provided evidence that they had either overcome a barrier prior to participation or that they circumvented a typical reading improvement barrier. This study corroborated that "efficient silent reading implies a strong correlation between a rapid reading rate and a high level of comprehension" (Gilliam et al., 2011, p. 120), as none of the participants read aloud or subvocalized through the whole passage during the reading observation. Gilliam et al. (2011) also found that the reading patterns that emerged from readers in their study were "as individual as the students producing them" (p. 125). While it is also true of the readers in this study, these adolescents who have made ambitious gains utilized reading processes that reflected a similar basic structure, then approximately three variations, perhaps suggesting that successful and growing readers recognize and utilize text structures and process that are effective. Gilliam et al. (2011) also found that there were no correlations between text complexity and reading behaviors. This study clearly counters that finding as these readers' patterns of self-talk increased and cursor movement slowed in the most challenging portion of the reading observation, the list of authors. This study also confirmed that school experiences are of the utmost importance for high school readers as they move to and through Stage 4 **(**Chall, 1983) and the importance of home literacy immersion in the early years (Chall, 1983). However, for several of these readers, home literacy has remained important through the adolescent years as well.

Many participants also confirmed the existence of systemic barriers to reading improvement, not as much for themselves but for others, citing tracking as potentially both helpful and harmful. The readers in this study did not, however, report a separation of their

authentic literacy identity from mainstream literacy and dominant forms of discourse, as experienced by the marginalized adolescent readers in Lesley's (2008) study. Quite the opposite phenomenon, in fact, was experienced by these readers who were not limited by the "positionality of the reader in response to perspectives presented and omitted in the ideological underpinning of texts" (Lesley, 2008, p. 181) but enthusiastically entered into the experience of a black man who ate pork and beans warmed by hot water from his faucet in a rented room, and who lost track of time reading about canonical writers from the western tradition.

However, while Lesley studied the impact of using a "non-school text" in a classroom (Tupac Shakur's "Life Through My Eyes), many participants had a truly "non-school text" – in their cases, not just a book that is not considered "of literary merit" but one not taught in school and also read and fully absorbed independently – which was a turning point for them, questioning not the importance of non-school texts for developing "discursive authority" (p. 188) but perhaps helping teachers and researchers understand the differences between adolescents who continue to grow and those who founder so that both can make strides. These participants' responses also challenge Lesley's (2008) assertion that adolescent readers should be encouraged to "seek no external validation about the meanings they are constructing" (Lesley, 2008, p. 187) as these participants benefitted from external validation from more-informed peers and more-experienced adults such as family members and teachers.

Another systemic barrier from the literature review that this study illuminates is Chall's (1983) call for "acceleration and enrichment . . . not only for precocious but for all readers" (1983, p. 113). While Chall was examining the negative impact of the absence of these two factors, the participants in this study confirm the importance of both in their reading development. All students in this study were either served by advanced academic offerings or

had been served by middle school tutorials or academic assistance in high school, perhaps assisting them all in overcoming systemic barriers to strong reading development.

Individual Interventions

Devontay's and Brianna's academic histories reflected a tutorial experience (Oyler et al., 2011) in middle school, which seemed to have a positive impact as their data began to move upward with some consistency prior to their ambitious gains in high school. Also, the repeated reading protocol (Hawkins et al., 2011), while not specifically mentioned as an intervention that the participants had been taught, was a strategy that they all utilized. This study did not confirm the power of reader text choice (Oyler et al., 2011) as an important element of these readers' ambitious gains, perhaps again because they had not been exposed to it, had not need this sort of intervention, or simply did not mention it in any of the three data collections. However, the participants did, intuitively perhaps, utilize the "say something" strategy and did initiate "roaming" within the text when discussing the reading observation passage with the researcher, which increased comprehension for most participants. This study did confirm the presence and importance of mentor texts (Oyler et al., 2011) for these participants as many found a book that made in difference for them through the assistance of a friend, a family member, a teacher, or a librarian.

Small-Group Interventions

All participants in this study had been exposed to reciprocal teaching (Apthorp & Clark, 2007; Biancarosa & Snow, 2006, Goldman, 2012; Santa, 2006) and metacognition exercises (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Ness, 2008; Santa, 2006) at Placid High School. All participants exhibited the elements of reciprocal teaching, especially self-questioning, in their self-talk, in their debriefs, or in their discussions of another experience with a text. This study also

confirmed the impact of unstructured peer discussion with no process, instruction, or guiding questions (McCallum et al., 2011), even though many of these participants chose to discuss informal discussions with their peers and family.

Whole-Class, Whole-School, and Systemic Interventions

The importance of strong classroom teaching as presented by Slavin et al. (2008) was reiterated many times by the participants in this study, both in direct assertion and in anecdotes that they shared regarding their reading improvement. This study also confirmed, for at least two participants, the power of the apprenticeship model of reading instruction (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006), in which the teacher encourages students to read like a content specialist. Molly and Arianna "read" like "writers" even though this model was not intentionally implemented at Placid High School. Participants also appreciated teachers who planned for social safety, personal identity expression, cognitive development, and knowledge-building, which together are ultimately a way of creating safe, collaborative space in which students can think as they learn to read more effectively (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006).

This study also confirmed the impact of strategy instruction (Apthorp & Clark, 2007; Biancarosa & Snow, 2006) as participants mentioned strategies such as context clues and main idea. These students were also able to transfer these skills to a new reading task, something that is a barrier for many students. This study also confirms the power of discussion-based whole classroom interventions and programs as cited by Goldman (2012), especially as mentioned by Sally.

The ability to apply a critical lens, outside of new criticism's formalism, was not a strong pattern in the participant comments, but Arianna specifically mentioned that she benefited from the advanced way of thinking about a text through the lenses of feminism, which supports

Walker's (2011) model of explicitly teaching critical theory as a reading tool. This study also confirmed the benefits of Fisher and Frey's (2013) model of close reading for all the participants. This more focused approach to these shifting roles of both teacher and student was appreciated by the participants and communicated in their last answer to the question, "How was what you did today different or similar to other reading experiences?" There was also an expectation of struggle (Fisher & Frey, 2013) that did not deter these participants during their reading observation.

This study also offers a novel contribution to research regarding adolescent reading improvement in that it explores the experiences of successful, not struggling, readers in an effort to discover the influences and traits that they deem important. Studies have focused on struggling readers and special education students (Edmonds et al., 2009), and previous researchers, such as Coombs (2012), cited this particular line of inquiry as recommendations for future research. The purpose of this study has been fulfilled in that shared characteristics and processes have been captured and described in order to more fully understand the phenomenon of ambitious growth. Specifically, this study suggests that classroom experiences, curricular models, and social networks can positively impact adolescent readers' growth in reading comprehension, and that schools must consider implementing changes to nurture this growth in all students. Perhaps the most significant contributions of this study overall are as follows: the importance of family and the nature of the social networks of these readers within the theme of Reading as Relationship; the progression to more fluid, non-linear cursor (and subsequently eye movement and attention) movement in the processes of these readers; and the shared characteristics of these improving readers of their fluency with the language of learning and their ability to express empathy.

Implications

The purpose of this section is to address the theoretical and empirical implications of this study, as well as practical implications for various stakeholders.

Theoretical Implications

This study utilized one conceptual frame and three theoretical frames in order to discern the significance of the study with regard to ideas that are relevant to secondary reading pedagogy. The implications with regard to Chall's reading stage scheme in addition to the theories of Brooks (new criticism), Rosenblatt (transactional reader response theory) and Vygotsky (social constructivism) will be examined.

While this study offers little challenge to Chall's (1983) scheme, it may perhaps serve a vital function in inviting practitioners and researchers to reconsider its importance and impact. First, Chall asserted that "most content areas in the secondary school lend themselves well to providing the needed challenge and practice – English (literature and composition), history, the social sciences, science, and the like" (Chall, 1983, p. 51), yet the reality is that few students must read to learn anything new in order to be successful in high school (Ness, 2008). Most participants associated the word *reading* with fiction, and every school-assigned text that was considered "hard" was fiction. Even though several participants associated the term *reading* with learning information in their own areas of interest, none associated reading with reading to learn in any school-based content area.

Curiously, with regard to the three theories examined through the stories of growing adolescent readers, it may be argued that these three theories indeed maintain their greatest influence in the classroom due to error and misinterpretation. Pantaleo (2013) reported that classroom teachers who utilize reader response based on Rosenblatt's theory do not consistently

move their students beyond emotive responses and lack the training and knowledge to understand for themselves the aesthetics of reading, while new criticism is seen by many as the old guard's patriarchal dismissal of the voices of the "other." The social constructivists' emphasis on collaboration has shrunk inward, creating student readers who exhibit co-dependency and do not approach independent reading with confidence. Vygotsky's work was dynamic and developed throughout his life, and much of his work has been oversimplified and misrepresented. Ultimately, Vygotsky's development of this theory leaves room for "two conceptions of education: a school that transmits knowledge or a school that seeks to rearrange learning situations in order to permit pupils to learn as agents with their peers' collaboration" (Yvon, Chaiguerova, & Newnham, 2013, p. 34). These participants' interviews, stories, and reading observations perhaps give credence to the complicated theoretical implications more than the simple, contemporary expectations that letting students work together helps everybody learn. Instead, this study supports the less-well-known Vygotskyan idea that schools exist to transmit knowledge from older, more experienced members of the group as these participants turned to their peers not to construct meaning but to discover it.

Furthermore, the positivist view of the text as authoritative embedded in new criticism must bend to see that each reader does indeed construct meaning, individually and as a member of a cultural group bound together by language and convention. Brooks continued:

> Yet to put the meaning and valuation of a literary work at the mercy of any and every individual would reduce the study of literature to reader psychology and to the history of taste. On the other hand to argue that there is no convincing proof that one reader's reaction is any more correct than another's is indeed a counsel of despair. (Brooks, 1979, p. 598)

Indeed, Brooks, one of the foremost new critics, grappled with the complexity of reading, acknowledging that prior knowledge gleaned from a cultural transaction is not to be ignored, nor is the process of individual meaning making. These readers who have made ambitious gains acknowledge the authority of the text and seek to understand the intent of the writer as primary considerations, rejecting the foundation of transactional reader response theory and social constructivism and confirming a new critical approach as underpinning their comprehension. Perhaps teachers and researchers may best serve adolescent readers with a three-stranded developmentally based approach that integrates text and reader, that harmonizes the individual and the community, and that prepares students to engage with texts of quality and value which explore the human condition.

All of these considerations raise the issue of curriculum models, which will be examined through the lens of van Brummelen's (2002) four curriculum orientations. While Placid High School, like all public schools, does not have the option of adopting a Christian curriculum orientation, the influence and effectiveness of the other three models, including the explicitly directed district model, can be determined through the participants' data. First, Placid High School and the district in which it resides must conform to the process/mastery curriculum model (van Brummelen, 2002) through the use of data to drive instructional decision-making at all levels and daily objectives tied to outcome-based standards. Student performance is expected to be linear and sequential. The teachers work in professional learning communities to research and implement strategies and sequences of instruction, then the outcomes are measured in pre- and posttests, district-wide benchmarks, and state and national standardized tests. However, only one student, Jairo, mentioned this curricular model in reflecting on his reading improvement, since his experience at Placid High School was so significantly different from the curricular

orientation with which he was familiar prior to moving. Several other students responded to the researcher's prompts with test data since this study was based on qualitative improvement ("How did you feel when you found out you had become a much better reader in high school?," improvement that was based on the ambitious gains model). However, one of the concerns that van Brummelen (2002) raised with this approach was that "in concentrating on specific objectives, does it overlook other long-term significant effects?" (p. 29). This study questions the effectiveness of this curricular model with regard to reading growth, and implicitly comments on the decline of reading comprehension scores nationally.

Second, Placid High School, like most public high schools, also integrates elements of the experiential curriculum model (van Brummelen, 2002), such as inquiry-based learning, differentiated instruction, relevance and personal meaning, and self-directed learning. Yet no participant mentioned a significant learning experience of this type in response to Interview Question 5: What are some of your high school experiences, if any, that you think helped you become a better reader? This raises issues for consideration with regard to curricular models based on the experiential orientation, especially since it trades learning time that may be spent in "curriculum topics that are not as immediately interesting to them but are nevertheless important for their overall development" for independent inquiry and creative thinking opportunities that "prevent other important topics from being considered" (van Brummelen, 2002, p. 34).

The curricular model suggested by the participants' responses most closely resembles not what they had explicitly received but what they implicitly knew had made an impact on them: the traditional orientation (van Brummelen, 2002). This curricular model includes structured subject matter designed to build a systematic content and knowledge base, frequent assessments following whole-group direct instruction, and reasoning skills. It is built on a core curriculum for

all students, regardless of academic strength or career interest, which features the writings of "great intellects" (p. 27). All 12 participants answered Interview Question 5 (What are some of your high school experiences, if any, that you think helped you become a better reader?) with a class, course, or reading experience that was based on rigorous coursework, mature and sophisticated texts, and assignments that required that they follow a learning sequence and come to an accurate comprehension-based interpretation of a literary work. Most of the participants had been exposed to the rigorous coursework of Advanced Placement classes, but those who had not also acknowledged the impact of reading and studying timeless texts from a new criticism perspective (for example, NaTalia's freshman-year *Lord of the Flies* analysis unit and Devontay's difficult but ultimately rewarding experience with *The Great Gatsby*). Additionally, the most often mentioned school experience during the reading story artifact portion of the data collection was a literary research project that was driven by the new criticism literary perspective that invited students to connect influences as well as stylistic elements to the overall craft of the novel, a more convergent than divergent task. These elements of this research study suggest the positive impact of a traditional curricular orientation on adolescent readers who have made ambitious gains and raises possible answers to the questions regarding declining reading scores in relation to curricular reform. This is the most important theoretical implication for the examination of adolescent reading growth in that this study offers student voices that may serve as a corrective for educators, administrators, and communities seeking the most appropriate curricular model.

Empirical Implications

Several empirical implications of this study will be examined in this section. First, ambitious growth did not occur at the point in time when participants believed that they had

grown "ambitiously" as readers, suggesting that qualitative studies of reading improvement should be conducted with both quantitative and qualitative data. Most studies in this area of research are conducted with one research methodology, but perhaps a mixed-methods approach may give a clearer picture of how adolescent readers experience reading challenges. This study also suggests that researchers more closely examine the underlying assumptions that drive research into reading comprehension. The studies that exist on adolescent reading, while admittedly few, reflect a constructivist view that is devoted to creating readers who can defend their interpretations, regardless as to how they do or do not approach the meaning of the text, and that does not consider the authority of the text as central. This theoretical bias may perhaps limit the questions and the methodology of research in this area.

Practical Implications

Practical implications for various stakeholders – including families of adolescents, high school students themselves, and educators and educational leaders – will be examined in this section.

The most important practical implication for families of adolescents is to consider how they might extend the impact of a home literacy culture beyond the early years. Most adults who are involved in raising children understand the importance of reading during the early years, but these participants' reading story artifacts and interviews suggest that a family-centered culture of literacy during their teen-age years was also important to their continued development. Families should consider how they might discuss texts, share books, and otherwise interact with their adolescents about reading, both efferent and aesthetic. These participants also encourage us not to be discouraged when we think they are not listening, because they always are.

This study offers several practical implications for high school students themselves. First, adolescents who desire to grow as readers should consider participating in the most rigorous learning experiences available in their school, regardless as to their own interests or career goals. Second, they must understand that school is not enough, regardless as to the curricular model or the rigor of the coursework, to ensure full development. Many students leave reading and thinking at school, but these participants all had active, curious minds that sought reading experiences, research, and opportunities to share outside of the school day, suggesting that adolescents who desire to grow should consider ways that they might read beyond school requirements and boundaries. Third, they must resist contemporary trends to read only books, even choice books, about people like themselves facing conflicts and problems like theirs. The participants in this study were able to connect flexibly with the narrator very different from themselves, and they were pushed to positive development as readers by struggling with difficult texts about characters whose life experiences were very different from theirs. Granted, they were able to find a personal connection (Aidan's "I like pork and beans, too" or Arianna's "Yeah, well, I do that too") but they were not limited to reading only through similarities. Finally, adolescent readers should consider how they might build or participate in social networks that facilitate the sharing of texts, any texts (even ones they don't particularly like), and the flow of ideas. These networks of friends and other readers may not only support reading development but perhaps more importantly serve as a place to belong during inevitable periods of isolation or displacement.

Finally, this study offers many implications for educators and educational leaders such as curriculum administrators and district-level decision-makers. Aspects of both curriculum and

classroom practice will be considered, specifically implications regarding content and skills,

pedagogy, professional development, and school community.

With regard to content and skills, implications of this study for classroom practice will be

examined first, followed by implications for curriculum leaders. First, teachers in all disciplines

should consider ways to implement effective general vocabulary instruction in addition to

strategy instruction such as using context clues. Unfamiliarity with vocabulary that adolescent

readers will confront in sophisticated and challenging texts is a persistent barrier, one that they

will not overcome without effective instruction. Teachers across the disciplines must also

consider ways to incorporate, encourage, and develop analogous thinking in their students in

order to impact their overall cognitive development and reading development. All of these

participants independently engaged in creating and exploring metaphors as they read and talked

about their reading experiences, and all disciplines invite students to engage in abstract,

metaphorical thinking to grasp important concepts, from *pi* to string theory, not just the

inferential leaps that readers must make to interpret poetry and characterization in literature.

Additionally, teachers must agree within school communities on academic vocabulary and

elements of writers' craft so that students are exposed to effective and consistent terminology.

These adolescent readers who made ambitious gains were fluent in the language of learning, both

general and specific to English language arts and reading, and approaches that build these

difficult and abstract concepts effectively may help other readers also make ambitious gains in

that they may have more tools to read aesthetically. Practitioners may also find great benefit in

developing empathy in their students, as readers and as people. The shared characteristic of

expressing empathy resonated not only with the participants' understanding of other readers'

barriers but extended into their ability to read a difficult text with accuracy and aplomb in the reading observation.

This study also offers an important implication for classroom teachers as well as educational leaders who guide curriculum decisions within a greater sphere of influence. Practitioners in general, and English teachers in particular, may want to reconsider the role of student choice with regard to reading experiences. The power of student choice is heralded as important in literacy improvement, and no doubt there is a place for open student choice, but this study, along with the conceptual and theoretical frames, suggests that there are boundaries within which choice may be an effective element of adolescents' school reading experiences. These boundaries include works of literary merit that offer a timeless truth or conflict for reflection and evaluation written in a style that lifts the message. The Common Core "Three-Part Model of Measuring Text Complexity" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) offers an effective way of understanding text complexity and how to sequence powerful reading experiences. Although the Common Core has been replaced in most states with their own statements of learner standards, it is still helpful in choosing – and perhaps helping students choose – texts that will support their development. The measures of text complexity are not only Lexile (or quantitative) concerns of advancing vocabulary and syntactical structure, but also qualitative dimensions such as knowledge demands on the reader, language conventions, and aesthetic effects, as well as reader-task fit, which considers the relationship between motivation and prior experiences of the reader and the text itself. Practitioners may heed the voices of the participants in this study who understood that reading texts that were challenging assisted their development. Whether students are assigned significant texts (and are supported while they approach them) or they choose from a list that

includes texts with at least two measures of text complexity, teachers must be willing to consider the benefits gained from students' reading of these texts as greater (though much more hard-fought) than gains from reading young adult literature as a school-assigned text. This point of view must be supported by curriculum leaders, district level administrators, and other decision-makers if it is to be a consistent and coherent component of the reading experiences of all students, and this study suggests that all types of students benefit from exposure to these types of works.

Next, implications for pedagogy as they relate to classroom teachers will be considered. First, teachers may want to consider scheduling reading conferences with their students, along with other opportunities for students to talk about the text itself. Six of the 12 participants in this study experienced revelation regarding the meaning of the reading observation passage during the debrief with the researcher, and all participants said that discussing with the researcher what they had read was beneficial in some important way. However, students must be directed to refer to the text to confirm or challenge their own burgeoning understanding when reading independently, in groups, or with the classroom teacher in a reading conference. This is also addressed in Brooks' new criticism which proposes that there are reasonable boundaries for interpretations, and those boundaries are found within the text itself (Brooks, 1979), and in Rosenblatt's transactional reader response theory with her idea that there is defensible range of interpretation (Pantelo, 2013).

Practitioners may also want to consider the implications of this study on attitudes towards and utilization of the reading strategy of reading for a particular purpose. Teachers often tell or ask students to discover a purpose for reading a particular passage or text, but the participants' stories suggest that purpose was not essential to their reading comprehension. The instructions

for the reading observation and debrief were to just read – there would be no quiz after, the participants were told – and the few participants who mentioned purpose in their data collections said that they themselves had begun to read for different purposes that were not driven by the text or the assignment but by their own development as readers. While it is true that these readers are the successful one and that they may have had essentially contradictory experiences from adolescent readers who struggle, it may be worth remembering that giving purpose or narrowing relevance may indeed impede, not nurture, typical growth for readers who could grow into readers who can read under any circumstances.

With regard to the ways in which this study may inform curriculum decision-makers, the most important implication is the power of a developmental approach to reading growth. With this in mind, curriculum creators and implementers may want to consider committing to a reading-to-learn model that reflects the primary elements of Chall's scheme, especially considering the strong degree to which that scheme was reflected in the participants' reading story artifacts. Consideration of this scheme would also encourage creation of English language arts curriculum that infused Brooks' new criticism thoroughly in reading instruction, saving introduction to other literary theories, such as feminism and post-colonialism, for later in their academic journeys. According to Chall's sample comments that illustrate the movement from Stage 3 to Stages 4 and 5, it is clear that the introduction of existentialism, reader-response theory, constructivism, and moral individualism may actually impede students from moving into Chall's most advanced stage of reading, which is required in college, and instead remain at Stage 4 at best. Stage 4 is the stage at which high school students are stuck between fully trusting any text as authoritative (Stage 3 thinking that something is true if it is written somewhere) and the ability to evaluate effectively at Stage 5, thereby foundering too long at Stage 4, which reflects

the thinking that the conflicts between opposing points of view in different texts are not only irreconcilable but also proof that answers cannot exist. Perhaps in the collective cultural embrace of existentialism and deconstructionism culminates in the rush to accelerate curriculum, and time for development has been compromised along with the willingness to assert and evaluate truth claims. Educators may be wise to reclaim that time.

The second implication for educational decision-makers with regard to pedagogical approaches is this study's suggestion that a curriculum that removes the reading barriers experienced and empathetically suggested by these improving readers and that encourages the characteristics and processes associated with these improving adolescent readers may be worth considering. This would, of course, require agreement on desired outcomes across the curriculum, but may have benefits that far outweigh the challenges.

This study also suggests an implication for teacher training institutions as well as for continuing professional development. Specifically, teachers would certainly benefit from becoming familiar with Rosenblatt's transactional reader response theory, and letting go of the inaccurate and harmful misunderstanding that has infiltrated education; with Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, and letting go of replacing adult leadership in the classroom with too-loose peer interaction; and with Chall's reading scheme, and letting go of thinking that becoming a reader is a natural and magical process that will simply happen if they just read enough. These three theories, especially in combination, could be utilized to create a rich series of experiences for both our struggling and achieving readers.

Last, implications for whole school communities will be considered. These readers' stories reiterate the centrality and importance of libraries, and during this time of transformation of learning spaces in schools, planners may consider how to grow library spaces into places

where high school students can continue to access print media as well as create strong communities with media specialists, peers, and perhaps even other adults in their larger communities. Also, school communities must reflect on the role that reading plays in learning throughout the high school, then build sequenced curricula in multiple disciplines that invite students to expand their understanding of what it means to "read," that allow them to move from uncertainty to evaluation, and that expose them to the full continuum of reading experiences, from efferent to aesthetic. School communities, both the adolescents and the adults in high schools, should also remember the time constraints that create tension for students and the emotional margin that is required to fully engage with a challenging text. Schools must become safe places to try, and to be wrong, and to self-correct, and to take academic risks. Last, school communities would do well to consider ways to reinvigorate reading to learn with joy, as these participants all found so much joy in reading, and to acknowledge the good that can come from using data to drive instruction but to cautiously guard students' hearts. The laughter, hand claps, and direct references to enjoyment that punctuated all 12 participants' data collections are often absent in other contexts surrounding reading, and perhaps the members of school communities can discover and implement ways to bring this into the classroom. Ultimately we must find ways to nurture and inspire growth in students like these, who have no barriers to achieving ambitious growth, before they stagnate, or lose interest or, worse, spirit.

Delimitations and Limitations

The concern for this study was less in excluding possible participants than in finding a sufficient number of students who had experienced this phenomenon. However, due to the availability of quantitative data that facilitated identification of potential participants, the participants may have been ninth, 10th, or 11th graders in the year that they made the better-

than-expected gains that were measureable and measured, since many near grade-level or on grade-level students at Placid High School would have undergone, at a minimum, two rounds of MAP testing during their freshman year. Participants also had completed at least one year of high school prior to the year of the study so that they potentially could have been impacted by opportunities for growth during high school. Additionally, during the year in which the study was completed, all ninth and 10th graders as well as most 11th graders took the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI). The availability of standardized test scores such as PSAT and ACT scores for older students, especially juniors and seniors, were instrumental in identifying potential participants.

Regarding limitations, there were some associated with the site, some with the data, and some with the nature of phenomenology. First, this particular school did not have complete, updated testing records for students in either electronic or hard copy files. Therefore, gaps in the data were a challenge as the criterion for participating was ambitious gains, most readily apparent in standardized test scores. The researcher constructed data records for the participants in the high school of more than 1500 students, then used test correlation tools to identify ambitious gains in reading comprehension across measures. Also, the demographics of the participants in this study approached but did not fully correspond to the student population of Placid High School with regard to ethnicity or race; yet the breadth and scope of their points of view are reflected in other factors, as the students came from diverse economic backgrounds, ranged from special education students to academically and artistically gifted, spanned from compliant to nonconforming, have experienced both stability and transience, and were engaged in coursework across all levels and disciplines.

In terms of other limitations, there were several that shaped the approach to this study. First, discovering participants from a single site is an intuitive limitation to a phenomenology, but the teachers at this site, specifically the English teachers, did not exhibit a consistency in teaching styles, learning strategies, or approaches to reading instruction, diminishing the impact that might be present in a similar high school that has a more prescribed curricular approach. Another limitation is the reliance in this and all reading comprehension studies on standardized tests as measures of an invisible, internal process of meaning-making. However, all test data was exclusively collected from valid, reliable measures administered in tightly controlled testing environments, making the selection of participants based on reading comprehension improvement as strong as is possible. Also, due to the invisible and reflective nature of reading, the use of cursor movement was engaged and analyzed to approximate eye movement, time, and attention; however, this technique, while yielding interesting data, is limited in its capacity to reflect the physical aspects or the phenomenon of reading.

Additionally, an unavoidable limitation of a phenomenology is that there will be limited, if any, generalizability of findings to the larger community. However, because students shared stories in the interview phase as well as in the story chart artifact, the results "might be logically generalized to a larger population of students" since narratives often follow similar structural patterns (Coombs, 2012, p. 93), ultimately creating what Habermas and Bluck (2000) termed a "basic and normative grid" (p. 755) for understanding our individual lives within a cultural context.

Another inherent and tensional limitation was the opposing realities of the phenomenological valuing of immediacy (Barnacle, 2004) and the contemplative nature of remembering and reflecting, which is at the heart of reading (Dewey, 1910) and memory. This

tension remained central to conversations surrounding member checking, coding, and memoing in order to unbind and to approach the reconciliation of this tension.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following questions were raised by this study as recommendations for future research into this important and pertinent topic, the reading improvement of adolescent readers during high school:

- How can educators support whole-child development through reading instruction? Chall (1983) warned that cognitive development may slow while a student is becoming more proficient at the earlier stage reading skills, such as decoding. Chall concludes that "students may become deficient in their cognitive development, although their original problem may have been decoding alone" (Chall, 1983, p. 120), a chilling reminder that continuous improvement is not simply an ideal but a necessity for all students. A phenomenology of students who made both expected and ambitious gains as readers after experiencing a reading "slump" in which decoding continued to be an issue may shed light on this important question.

- How can students sustain continuous, incremental patterns of growth in reading comprehension? And how can educators best support the messy, scatter-plot shape of reading improvement in this era of data-driven instruction and teacher evaluation based on student performance? Any educator who has attempted to utilize historical standardized test data for individual students to design instruction has noticed that measured growth is uneven. Yet for some students, growth can be sustained, as shown by these participants. Perhaps future studies that correlate longitudinal reading

comprehension data for four years of high school with exposure to instructional sequences and methodologies can point the direction.

- How does course rigor fit into a cohesive vision of academic challenge for all students? It is interesting that of these 12 participants, nine had participated in Advanced Placement coursework. This may invite investigation through a program evaluation research protocol.

- Do struggling readers benefit from the same developmental approach that nurtured these improving readers? This question may merit a mixed methods approach that seeks to find correlations between the reading comprehension improvement point and school experiences, filtered through a phenomenological approach to hearing student voices explore their experiences as improving readers.

- How can we separate test performance from true measures of reading comprehension? What do reading comprehension tests scores mean, and how can we make sense of them, especially for underperforming students and for at-risk students? And further, how can we systemically measure and track reading growth accurately? Many of the freshmen at Placid High School who showed significant improvement from the fall to the winter SRI test indicated that their increased score was simply an outcome of their attention to the test: they wanted to avoid being placed (in their cases, misplaced) in a remedial reading class. They had been underperforming all along, since there had previously been no rewards or repercussions for growth or stagnation on reading comprehension tests. Yet these test scores were used to make important curricular and evaluative decisions for students, for teachers, and for school-level administrators as though they were reliable reflections of reading comprehension. A mixed methods approach that considers test

data and semi-structured interview data from a representative sample of students from a

range of academic backgrounds and demographics may be useful.

- What are the nature and the sources of the stigma of improvement? While many

    researchers have explored the nature of peer disapproval for students who make academic

    gains, and the participants in this study confirm that, the internal and individual rejection

    of improvement as a positive experience has not yet been investigated regarding reading

    comprehension. One of the most unsettling interactions that the researcher had during this

    study was an email from a parent who politely suggested that her child had not truly

    made gains, since she was always above grade level, and therefore would not be a

    meaningful participant in the study. Previously, the student was told by the classroom

    teacher who administered the first SRI assessment, on which she received a lower-than-

    expected score, that there was a "glitch" in the program. There was no such glitch; the

    teacher was attempting to assuage the student's distress over the results, but ultimately

    this undermined the student's potential to see the dynamic nature of reading growth, even

    in a strong reader such as herself. This negative association with improvement was

    echoed by two participants in this study who had either unfavorable or ambiguous

    reactions when told they had made significant improvements as readers. The underlying

    assumption from both the parent and student perspectives seemed to be that improvement

    implied previous sub-par performance. This is a phenomenon worth investigating,

    especially as educators move away from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset as explored

    by researchers and practitioners such as Carolyn Dweck. This question suggests a

    phenomenological study of a sample of educators, students, and parents who share this

perception as an effective methodology to explore this phenomenon, then perhaps may discover ways to mitigate its power.

- What other insights might be gleaned from the reading improvement stories of adolescents who have made ambitious gains? While narrative analysis was outside the methodological scope of this study, it became clear that the participants rejected the typical plot structure diagram offered as the basis for the artifact and instead implicitly relied on the fairy tale and/or the archetypal hero's journey structures. They told stories of magical transformations and of themselves as heroes with companions entering a strange, new world, then emerging from their conflict back home but essentially different. Perhaps narrative analysis may shed some light on adolescent readers' self-perceptions that would empower practitioners to assist these readers make more progress on their journeys.

Summary

This phenomenology addressed a gap in research of reading comprehension growth of adolescent readers by analyzing data from a semi-structured interview, a reading story artifact, and a reading observation. Previously, no studies had examined the experiences, influences, traits, and processes of successful readers, and these young adult voices had much to contribute to our understanding of this phenomenon. Chapter 5 included a discussion of how this study confirmed, challenged, and extended the conceptual frame of Chall's reading stage scheme and the theoretical frames of Brooks' new criticism, Rosenblatt's transactional reader response theory, and Vygotsky's social constructivism. It also examined current research on adolescent reading improvement in light of the participants' responses and highlighted this study's novel contribution to the field: its focus on successful, not struggling, readers who made ambitious

gains during high school, a period during which students nationally have exhibited a decline in reading comprehension scores across multiple measures since 1992. The theoretical, empirical, and practical implications were considered for various stakeholders. The delimitations and limitations of the study were also addressed, as were recommendations for future research topics and methodologies. The results of this study suggest that high schools can create rigorous classroom experiences and developmentally appropriate curricular conditions while encouraging social networks that will allow more adolescents to continue growing as readers.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did you feel when you found out that you had become a much better reader in high school?

2. What does the word *reading* mean to you?

3. Why do you think you are becoming a better reader?

4. Tell me about a time when you read something "hard." (Prompt questions: What were you reading? How did you feel? Why do you think you responded that way? What do you do when reading something that is difficult? Where did the idea for them come from?)

5. What are some of your high school experiences, if any, that you think helped you become a better reader?

6. Why do you think most students don't continue to grow as readers as they get older? What would you like to tell teachers who want to help these students become better readers?

7. Tell me the story of how you became a better reader. Who are the characters in your story? What was the conflict? Inciting incident? When was the crisis? The climax? How does your story end? What do you think might happen next? Let's fill out a story chart together based on your narrative.

8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your experience with becoming a better reader while in high school?

9. How would you like me to remember you as a reader?

APPENDIX B: COMPOSITE READING STORY CHART AND PLOT DIAGRAM

Exposition

"Once upon a time (Aaliyah, Sally, Devontay) – and – can I talk in first person? – OK" (Sally). So, my reading story starts when **[1]** "I was in middle school and we had that whole thing where you want to be cool, you don't want to be the nerd who sits in a room and reads" (Kimberly). **[2]** But one day when a friend and I "were in the library[,] she asked me why I wanted the book [I had grabbed to check out], and I didn't have a relevant reason . . . . She had read it before and [when] she told me about the book, I didn't want to get it, [then] she basically told me that . . . when I want to check out a book I should read the back first. That was the first step I took into like actually *reading*" (Devontay).

[3] "[When I] was just getting in high school" (Brianna), "[I] was scared . . . and [I] felt like the world was closing in on [me] because [I] didn't have any friends, so instead of making friends [I] picked up books and started reading" (Brianna). **[4]** Then "my dad moved away" (Jennifer) and, **[5]** "I don't know, I guess I kinda like eventually grew out of [trying to be cool] (Kimberly and Aidan). Like, you know I'm gonna do my own thing, I'm gonna be who I am, I'm not gonna try to just be who everybody wants me to be" (Kimberly). **[6]** "So I got back into reading, especially freshman year, and [on my own] I found like a lot of book series that I liked, and they probably weren't a very high level [giggles] kind of book but they were interesting and kept my attention" (Kimberly).

[7] At the same time, "whenever I got to high school and people weren't able to hold the same conversation I was, . . . it was frustrating when you can't find somebody to tit-for-tat with your brain level . . . [laugh]" (NaTalia). **[8]** Then "I started to hang around other people who

were like smarter than me and I thought, 'Uh-oh, I have to do better with the Kristen Livingstons of the world,' like 'OK, I have to pick it up'" (Aidan).

[9] But on the downside, "when I got to high school, it – it pretty much kind of *killed* my [independent] reading as compared to what it was before. Before, I would be in the library twice a day, and like librarians always knew me. I got here freshman year and probably like once a week I'd be in the library picking out a new book here and there. . . . I just had school and I was a lot busier so I didn't have time read as many novels and things" (Phionex).

Inciting Incident

[10] But the books I was exposed to at school really created a problem for me, "going from reading these really popular, easy books to going to the obscure books that are not so easy to understand" (Jairo). At the "end of freshman year . . . we were reading a lot of nonfiction intertwined with some fiction. We did *To Kill* a *Mockingbird* and then we did a lot of speeches and things like that, so we were having to switch between handling things more figuratively, like what could the author be saying, and then like direct, what is the author saying, things like that" (Arianna). [11] When I "[moved] into sophomore year with Ms. D." (Arianna, Molly, Jennifer, Aaliyah), "I kinda had to kick it into high gear, so I put in a lot more effort to do better" (Aidan). [12] "I really liked that class [with Ms. D.] because she gave us a lot of creative freedom" (Arianna), but all that we did was pretty new to me. "We didn't really do a lot of reading and testing at my other school cuz I came from a school in Vermont, we didn't have like standardized tests, standardized tests for reading" (Jairo), "so I definitely struggled getting into 11th grade. . . . and I think [13] I walked into AP Lit and I think the first time . . . we had to analyze a piece of work, I literally was just sitting there like I have no idea what to write, so [14] I definitely asked

a lot of questions, like to friends surrounding me – I definitely got a lot of help the first time"
(Sally).

Rising Action

There was a lot more going on in my life than just school getting harder. **[15]** I "joined
the cheerleading team? and [I] got exposed to a lot of different things in high school that nobody
tells you about" [little laugh] (Aaliyah). **[16]** But "[I] started reading books that weren't the type
of books that [I'd] always been reading, [I] branched out into new genres and that kind of
motivated [me] to reading all these different kinds of stories . . ." (Aaliyah). **[17]** There were
"definitely some conflicts when I was just adjusting to the text, you know, comparing – going
from reading like John Green or whatever's like popular to like Anton Chekov – it's a huge
difference – reading like *Slaughterhouse 5* compared to that, it's [giggles] a big difference. So
that was definitely difficult to adjust to" (Jennifer), but it all worked together to help me **[18]**
"branch out in real life and talk to new people, people who [I] previously wouldn't have talked
to, and try new things and kind of try a different approach at school and just at life" (Aaliyah).

I needed help, though, with the challenges of reading and of life. **[19]** "I [would] ask [Ms.
X] questions – and then I think just every time we did that, just doing it more and more led to the
understanding of what – and slowly I would like not need more help, I could just get started
[reading challenging texts] myself" (Sally).**[20]** I also figured out how to overcome some of my
reading struggles – a lot of the time "I didn't like to read because I didn't understand a lot of
words" (Devontay), "but one of my teachers [had us] write down the word if you didn't know the
definition and write down the definition – that helped, learning not to ignore the word but go and
find out what it meant" (Sally).

Also, my family was a big help as I continued improving. **[21]** "There was a family friend who was helping me read . . .with some of the historical context stuff. We were on holiday, [and] . . . my grandma . . . [helped] me [with] the reading part of [a novel I was studying] – stuff from the mid-20th century that wasn't clear to me. I appreciated that I could hear like some truthful elements of the time period, from somebody who had experienced it" (Arianna).

Crisis/Climax

[22] "And as [I] began reading [more challenging books], [my] mind was overfilled with – with a lot of knowledge" (Brianna), but **[23]** "I don't even think I realized that I knew how" (Sally) I became a better reader, **[24]** "I just think it just kind of happened" (Sally).

Well, there were some clues along the way, I guess. **[25]** "There was this teacher that told [me] – her name was Ms. X – that [my] reading was drastically improved" (Brianna), and **[26]** "I do remember that on . . . my SATs I'd gone from a like 540 . . . to like 680, . . . So I'm pretty sure something happened in there and **[27]** I'm pretty sure it was probably, uh, probably reading *The Great Gatsby*, honestly" (Phionex).

But now that I think about it, it could have been *The Great Gatsby* (Phionex, Devontay, Aaliyah) – or maybe it was *Fahrenheit 451* (Molly), or maybe "*The Bell Jar* [that] was definitely my turning point" (Arianna). There was this **[28]** research project in English where "we got to write a lot . . . and we got to do our final paper, our research project" (Arianna), on a book from a list that Ms. D. gave us. "[She] made us do the analytical essay and didn't tell us anything about it [giggles] – that I think . . . was a jumping point for me because I did enjoy the book – even though I didn't get a good grade on that little part [giggles] – uh, it still helped, I guess. It made me a better reader because I became slightly more independent even though not fully independent obviously" (Molly).

"I loved the book – and then I had to take in all these parts . . . . It was the most I had like looked at one novel or text and picked it apart that much, and **[29]** when I turned it in I was really proud of myself that I had gotten that in depth" (Arianna). "It's not a book that would have appealed to me, unless it was actually assigned for school. **[30]** Reading it . . . sort of broke that barrier that stopped me from reading those books, it broke that barrier and opened me to look at *those* books . . . it broke that barrier to reading about other cultures, it seems. . . . And I mean, I think it's just that beliefs *shift*, they *shifted* something in my mind that made it easier for me to *see* something . . . (Phionex). Yep, "that was definitely my turning point. I was looking at everything I read from the novel in a much more uh deep and involved way instead of just what's on the page" (Arianna), and "it pushed me a little bit farther..." (Molly).
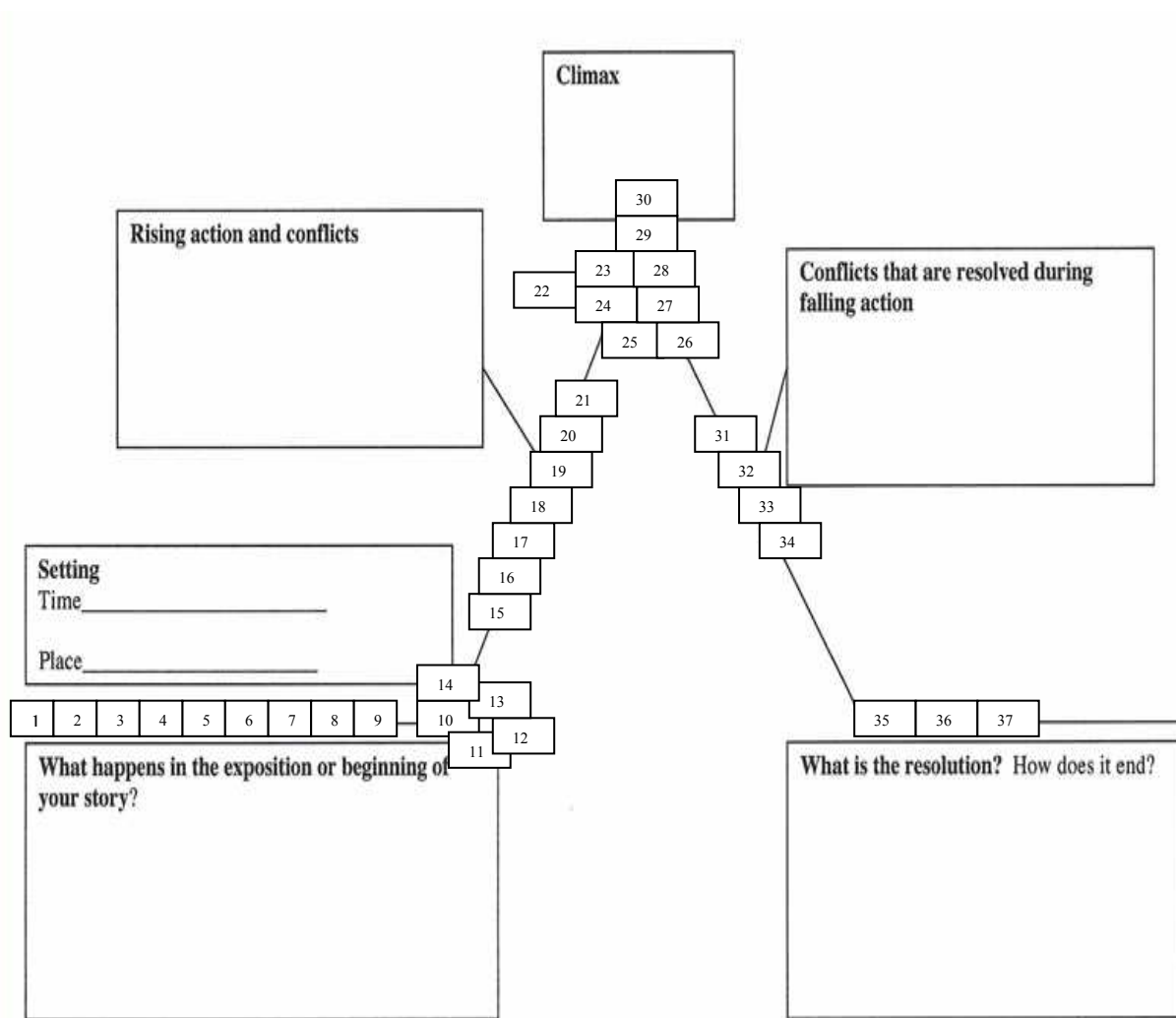
Falling Action/Resolution/Conclusion

"My falling action? **[31]** Definitely last year in AP Lit and even this year, and I uhm have learned a lot about how to read for understanding and for meaning and to read different types of things whether it's a poem or nonfiction or like I mentioned earlier, the old stuff [laughs] that you can't even draw any immediate understanding from – uhm, more of the techniques, like how to write even if I don't really get them until right at the end and identify what's going on" [laughs] (Arianna).

[32] "Another part of the falling action was the AP Lit exam – that was some of the best writing I have ever done in my life – when I walked out I was like I felt like I had shed a whole new layer of skin   I just put some really nice things in my paper [laughs] so I was really happy I had worked that hard all year and was able to pull it off at the end, that I had gotten it and everything clicked into place" (Arianna).

So, "how does [my reading story] end? I think – I don't think it ends. I think.... I don't know what to expect in college but I do hope that I have done enough up to this point that it's not a slap in the face and I can handle it – at least this will be a **[33]** definite building block for wherever I go from here, the step is not going to be that big – an easy transition hopefully" (Arianna). "I mean, I'm only [in high school], so hopefully the resolution is going to maybe be – going to college and continuing to read and hopefully **[34]** find something that I want to do and continuing to read" [Aaliyah].

But my conclusion? How about this – **[35]** "And from then on she's still reading and still improving in her everyday life and hopefully one day [she will be really] smart...." [*laughs out loud*] (Brianna). **[36]** "And she's gonna live happily ever after with six dogs and a big house – on a lake [laugh] . . . [with] different rooms for different genres" [laughs](Aaliyah). **[37]** For now, though, maybe I'll read *War and Peace* (Kimberly), or maybe a book about basketball (Devontay), because "there's always going to be another story that's better than the last one you read" (Jairo).

Climax

30
29

Rising action and conflicts

23 | 28
22
24 | 27
25 | 26

Conflicts that are resolved during falling action

21
20
19
31
18
32
17
33
16
34
15

Setting
Time_____

Place_____

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |

14
13
10
11 | 12

35 | 36 | 37

What happens in the exposition or beginning of your story?

What is the resolution? How does it end?

APPENDIX C: TEXT FOR READING OBSERVATIONS

Grades 11-12 (FK 6.1 to 10.0)

That night in my rented room, while letting the hot water run over my can of pork and beans in the sink, I opened *A Book of Prefaces* and began to read. I was jarred and shocked by the style, the clear, clean, sweeping sentences. Why did he write like that? And how did one write like that? I pictured the man as a raging demon, slashing with his pen, consumed with hate, denouncing everything American, extolling everything European or German, laughing at the weakness of people, mocking God, authority. What was this? I stood up, trying to realize what reality lay behind the meaning of the words….Yes, this man was fighting, fighting with words. He was using words as a weapon, using them as one would use a club. Could words be weapons? Well, yes, for here they were. Then maybe, perhaps, I could use them as a weapon? No. It frightened me. I read on and what amazed me was not what he said, but how on earth anybody had the courage to say it.

Occasionally I glance up to reassure myself that I was alone in the room. Who were these men about whom Mencken was talking so passionately? Who was Anatole France? Joseph Conrad? Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood Anderson, Dostoevski, George Moore, Gustave Flaubert, Maupassant, Tolstoy, Frank Harris, Mark Twain, Thomas Hardy, Arnold Bennett, Stephen Crane, Zola, Norris, Gorky, Bergson, Ibsen, Balzac, Bernard Shaw, Dumas, Poe, Thomas Mann, O. Henry, Dreiser, H.G. Wells, Gogol, T.S. Eliot, Gide, Baudelaire, Edgar Lee masters, Stendhal, Turgenev, Huneker, Nietzsche, and scores of others? Were these men real? Did they exist or had they existed? And how did one pronounce their names?

I ran across many words whose meanings I did not know, and I either looked them up in a dictionary or, before I had a chance to do that, encountered the word in a context that made its meaning clear. But what strange world was this? I concluded the book with the conviction that I had somehow overlooked something terribly important in life. I had once tried to write, had once reveled in feeling, had let my crude imagination roam, but the impulse to dream had been slowly beaten out of me by experience. Now it surged up again and I hungered for books, new ways of looking and seeing. It was not a matter of believing or disbelieving what I read, but of feeling something new, of being affected by something that made the look of the world different.

As dawn broke I ate my pork and beans, feeling dopey, sleepy. I went to work, but the mood of the book would not die; it lingered, coloring everything I saw, heard, did. I now felt that I knew what the white men were feeling. Merely because I had read a book that had spoken of how they lived and thought, I identified myself with that book. I felt vaguely guilty. Would I, filled with bookish notions, act in a manner that would make the whites dislike me?

from "Part One: Southern Night" of Richard Wright's *Black Boy* (1945)

APPENDIX D: PROMPTS FOR READING OBSERVATIONS

Instructions Before Reading

Read the excerpt, using the cursor to show me where you are in the text. While you are reading, please think out loud, sharing any comments or questions as they occur to you. Take your time and enjoy this – there is no quiz at the end. When you are ready, we will talk about the passage together.

After Reading

What would you like to tell me or to talk about from your reading of the passage?

Prompt Questions

The following questions may or may not be used as the participant discusses the passage with me. I have planned them in advance in the event that the participant is nervous, uncertain, or less able to approach the grade-level text independently.

1. What questions would you like to ask about this passage?

2. Retell the passage in your own words.

3. What do you think is the most important or strangest detail in the passage? What do you make of it?

4. What did you notice that might be ironic in this passage? Tell me about it.

> Prompt: Why did Mencken's book surprise Richard Wright? How is Richard Wright different from his peers by the end of the passage?

5. Tell me about an experience you have had that is similar to what happened to the narrator's/character's experience. Do you agree with the author's point?

> Prompts: Do you agree or disagree with the author's argument that books can change us deeply? Why or why not?

6. How was reading with me today like anything (or nothing) you have done before in school?

What was similar and different?

APPENDIX E: READING OBSERVATION FREQUENCY OF COMMENTS

The numbers in parentheses after an underlined portion of the passage indicate the frequency that participants connected self-talk to each portion during the reading observation.

That night in my rented room, while letting the hot water run over my can of <u>pork and beans in the sink</u> (1), I opened *A Book of Prefaces* (4) and <u>began to read</u> (1). I was <u>jarred</u> (1) and shocked by the style, the <u>clear, clean, sweeping sentences</u> (1). Why did <u>he write like that?</u> (1) And how did one write like that? I pictured the man as a <u>raging demon</u>,(1) slashing with his pen, <u>consumed with hate</u> (1), denouncing everything American, <u>extolling</u> (1) everything European or <u>German</u> (2), laughing at the weakness of people, <u>mocking God</u> (1), authority. <u>What was this?</u> (1) I stood up, trying to realize what reality lay behind the meaning of the words….Yes, this man was fighting, <u>fighting with words</u> (1). He was using words as a weapon, using them <u>as one would use a club</u> (2). Could words be weapons? Well, yes, for here they were. Then maybe, perhaps, I could use them as a weapon? No. <u>It frightened me</u> (1). I read on and <u>what amazed me was not what he said, but how on earth anybody had the courage to say it</u> (5).

<u>Occasionally I glance up to reassure myself that I was alone in the room</u> (1). Who were these men about whom <u>Mencken</u> (2) was talking so passionately? Who was <u>Anatole</u> (4) France? Joseph <u>Conrad</u> (1)? Sinclair Lewis, Sherwood <u>Anderson</u> (1), <u>Dostoevski</u> (3), George Moore, Gustave <u>Flaubert</u> (2), Maupassant, <u>Tolstoy</u> (1), Frank Harris, Mark Twain, Thomas Hardy, Arnold Bennett, Stephen Crane, Zola, Norris, <u>Gorky</u> (2), <u>Bergson</u> (1), Ibsen, Balzac, Bernard Shaw, <u>Dumas, Poe</u> (1), Thomas Mann, O. Henry, Dreiser, H.G. Wells, Gogol, T.S. Eliot, Gide, Baudelaire, <u>Edgar Lee Masters</u> (1), Stendhal, <u>Turgenev</u> (2), Huneker, <u>Nietzsche</u> (1), and <u>scores</u>

of others (1)? Were these men real? Did they exist or had they existed? (2) And how did one pronounce their names? (2)

I ran across many words whose meanings I did not know, and I either looked them up in a dictionary (2) or, before I had a chance to do that, encountered the word in a context that made its meaning clear. But what strange world was this? I concluded the book with the conviction (1) that I had somehow overlooked something terribly important in life (3). I had once tried to write, had once reveled in feeling, had let my crude imagination (1) roam, but the impulse to dream had been slowly beaten out of me by experience. Now it surged up again and I hungered for books, new ways of looking and seeing (2). It was not a matter of believing or disbelieving what I read, but of feeling something new, of being affected by something that made the look of the world different (2).

As dawn (1) broke I ate my pork and beans, feeling dopey, sleepy (4). I went to work, but the mood of the book would not die; it lingered, coloring everything I saw, heard, did. (2) I now felt that I knew what the white men were feeling (2). Merely because I had read a book that had spoken of how they lived and thought, I identified myself with that book. I felt vaguely guilty (2). Would I, filled with bookish notions, act in a manner that would make the whites dislike me (6)?

APPENDIX F: IRB APPROVAL

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

August 6, 2015

Anne Summerall Poplin
IRB Approval 2249.080615: Adolescent Reading Improvement: A Phenomenology of High
School Students' Perspectives

Dear Anne,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This
approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol
number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the
methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update
form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research
project.

Sincerely,

LIBERTY
UNIVERSITY.

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

APPENDIX G: PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

<div align="right">
The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved
this document for use from
8/6/15 to 8/5/16
Protocol # 2249.080615
</div>

PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM
ADOLESCENT READING IMPROVEMENT:
A PHENOMENOLOGY OF HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES
by
Anne Summerall Poplin
Liberty University
Education Department

Your child is invited to be in a research study of students who have become better readers. He or she was selected as a possible participant because he or she has made gains in reading comprehension while in high school. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to allow him or her to be in the study.

Anne Poplin, a doctoral candidate in the Education Department at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of high school students who are reading better now than when they began high school. Very few students make gains in reading comprehension while in high school, and those who do can help educators understand how this improvement occurs so that they can advocate for students more effectively.

Procedures:
If you agree to allow your child/student to be in this study, I would ask him or her to do the following things:
1.) Take part in an interview
2.) Create a story chart while being recorded (audio only of student)
3.) Read a grade-level text.
It should take approximately an hour for your child to complete the process. Your child's participation will be completely confidential.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:
The risks associated with this study are minimal and no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life.
While there are no direct benefits for participants, the expected benefits associated with participation are what the participant might learn about reading and the opportunity to participate in a research study. The participants will also gain a very distinctive experience for college application, employment applications, or Senior Project.

Compensation:
While there is no direct compensation for participants, your child will receive a healthy snack during the interview process.

Confidentiality:
Participants' privacy will be maintained as the interviews will be conducted in the Student Resource Room of the Guidance Office. The records of this study will be kept private. All interviews, story charts, transcriptions, and other data will be kept in a password-protected computer file; physical papers will be stored in a locked file cabinet. The audio recordings of the participants' reading of the grade-level text will be password protected as well.

In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. All records will be destroyed within the timeframe required by Liberty University.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child/student to participate will not affect his or her current or future relations with Liberty University or South Aiken High School. If you decide to allow your child/student to participate, he or she is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study:
If your child chooses to withdraw from the study, you or he/she should contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should your child choose to withdraw, data collected from him or her, including the audio recording of the grade-level reading passage, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Contacts and Questions:
The researcher conducting this study is Anne S. Poplin. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at apoplin@acpsd.net. You may also contact the research's faculty advisor, Dr. Grania Holman, at ggholman@liberty.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Carter 134, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:
I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to allow my child/student to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO ALLOW YOUR CHILD/STUDENT TO PARTICIPATE
UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN
ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

o   The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record my child/student as part of his or her participation in this study.

Signature of minor: _____ Date: _____

Signature of parent or guardian: _____ Date: _____

Signature of investigator: _____ Date: _____