"Feeling like I'm slow because I'm in this class":
Secondary School Contexts and the Identification and
Construction of Struggling Readers

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Educational Studies)
in the University of Michigan
2014

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DEDICATION

      I dedicate this dissertation to the young people and teachers who let me into their lives for this study. Thank you for trusting me with your perspectives and experiences. You created and navigated a rich and complex world, and I was honored to be a part of it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my family whose ongoing love and support carried me through my doctoral work. My family showed unwavering confidence that I could do this, and they kept me lighthearted and laughing. My partner, Brett, was my home base. He provided untold amounts of emotional and scholarly support, and when I became overwhelmed, he found ways to remind me that this work is a pleasure to do. Finally, our son, Ezra, with all of his baby needs and baby love, kept me grounded.

It is not an exaggeration to say that Elizabeth Moje made this dissertation possible. Her stewardship through coursework and preliminary exams prepared me to ask critical questions and then to design and conduct this study. Our countless conversations about youth, literacy, identity, culture, and schools challenged my assumptions and pushed my thinking. Most importantly, Elizabeth continually reminded me that students are not just readers and writers; they are always young people first.

The members of my dissertation committee were tremendous mentors. Deborah Keller-Cohen encouraged me to grapple with theories of context and consider how students and teachers dynamically build contexts in schools. Carla O'Connor raised important questions about the role of youths' agency and power in the co-construction of school contexts. Annemarie Palincsar helped me to meaningfully situate my work in the landscape of literacy research. I very much appreciate their time and thoughtful attention.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the contexts in and across which students read and learn the texts demanded in high school. Despite increasing public concern regarding the number of American youth who experience reading difficulty, little research has examined the extent to which adolescents' reading skills vary across school spaces or the ways in which changing school contexts mediate literacy learning. To address this gap, I designed a school-year long qualitative study of the relationship between school contexts and reading. I focused my research on students identified as struggling readers and compared their experiences to similar peers who were not labeled as such.

I shadowed eight struggling readers across U.S. history, algebra, and reading classes in a large, culturally and linguistically diverse high school. Participants also included 14 comparative peers and eight teachers. Data sources included 425 hours of observations, 62 interviews, achievement and reading assessment data, behavior and attendance records, and classroom artifacts. I used Constant Comparative Analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to identify patterns across data.

Analysis showed that students', teachers', and administrators' interactions with particular school contexts not only identified reading difficulty but also constructed 'struggling readers.' First, as students moved across classroom spaces, their interactions among social and instructional contexts mediated reading skill. When youths experienced high-quality disciplinary literacy instruction embedded in positive student-teacher

relationships, they demonstrated improving or proficient reading and enacted productive literacy identities. In these instances, instruction and relationships reinforced each other to support readers in powerful ways.

Second, as students, teachers, and administrators interacted in (and constructed) institutional contexts related to reading intervention and compliance-oriented behavior management, struggling readers tended to be positioned as deficit readers and "behavior problems."

Finally, although teachers and students mutually built contexts and power flowed unpredictably, teachers had authority to follow through on their interactions in ways that could support or compromise youths' opportunities to learn. Students could resist positioning, but their resistance did not disrupt deficit positioning.

Findings have implications for the reorganization of secondary reading interventions, the enactment of disciplinary literacy instruction for youth identified as struggling readers, and the important role of relationships in high-quality instruction.

CHAPTER I

Introduction

When I began my career as a high school teacher in a traditionally organized high school, I noticed that young people moved from class period to class period and teachers usually only interacted with a student within one class. In this way, our typical master schedule did not afford adults the opportunity to interact with, to observe, or to know students across multiple settings. What my role as a high school reading specialist and special education teacher afforded me, however, was a different view. I co-taught in different content area classes with many different teachers. My primary charge was to help students—those identified as struggling, some with and some without special education qualification—become effective readers and writers. To that end, I worked with students across different disciplinary knowledge domains and practices, times of day, classroom spaces, participation structures, peer groups, texts, teachers, and different learning arrangements that leveraged to varying extents their everyday and community knowledge. In other words, I worked with students across many different contexts, and sometimes students looked like, indeed *were*, quite different kinds of students and young people across different spaces and times. I noticed how struggling readers could appear more and less struggling—more and less proficient, confident, agentic, skilled, strategic, engaged, and curious—as they participated in and helped construct different contexts.

Although students' variations in proficiency and difficulty happened among shifting contexts within the same class period, changes were particularly pronounced across classroom spaces.

I do not mean to romanticize this phenomenon. Many of these students experienced some degree of difficulty with the literacy demands of secondary school regardless of classroom space or context, but the shifts I saw students enact across contexts represented learning opportunities for teachers. That is, if teachers could see students differently, could they begin to imagine how they could work with students to construct contexts that support learning for many different types of youth? With that question in mind, I began to wonder what dimensions of context mattered most and for whom. What would it mean if content area teachers and researchers shifted our attention from identifying, problematizing, and remediating struggling readers to understanding and improving contexts for reading?

With these questions in mind, I conducted a dissertation study about the relationship between secondary school contexts and youth identified as struggling readers. I analyzed the contexts young people interacted in and across as they moved through their daily school lives to better understand the role that context played in the demonstration of reading-related skills, practices, and identities. By foregrounding contexts, I aimed to avoid a conceptualization of reading difficulty as existing solely inside the reader and, instead, to conceptualize difficulty—and proficiency—as manifesting in the interaction between struggling readers and different dimensions of contexts. Building on adolescent literacy research that has examined the role of school-based reading contexts, (e.g., Dillon, 1989; Hinchman & Zalewski, 1996; Ivey, 1999;

Moje, et al., 2004), I sought to explicate how, when, and why students' and teachers' interactions with school contexts mediated young people's reading. Because contexts do not 'happen' to young people, I was careful to analyze how youths constructed, navigated, and resisted school contexts together with their teachers and other school personnel.

In the following chapters, I present the study and discuss how my findings help explicate the relationship between contexts and young people identified as struggling readers. I conclude the dissertation by discussing implications for the reorganization of secondary reading intervention and literacy teaching. In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss the study's rationale, research questions and design overview, and key constructs.

Rationale

Despite the variability that struggling secondary readers can demonstrate (Dillon 1989; Hall 2007; Ivey, 1999), young people are often cast as unidimensional readers (Moje, et al., in progress) having static within-person reading skills. Research has shown, however, that reading happens as an interaction between the reader and the text (Rumelhart, 1994) inside of an activity (Snow, 2002) and situated in a larger context (Scribner & Cole, 1981). This interactive view of reading problematizes the notion that a reader possesses a stable skill set, a fixed literacy identity, or a level of motivation that transfers wholesale from one reading event to another. Of course, a reader does not begin entirely anew each time she reads; her history of participation in reading events informs subsequent events. Still, to a large degree, what one reads (and what one knows about it), where and why one reads, and with whom one reads, all shape the nature of the reading

that happens. Therefore, as texts, activities, and contexts change, so does the demonstration of reading skill or difficulty (Lipson & Wixson, 1986).

Moreover, the concepts of skill and ability, themselves, are socially constructed (e.g., McDermott & Varenne, 1995; Mehan, Hertweck, Meihls, 1987). Therefore, young people can be socially positioned to enact struggling reader identities (e.g., Alvermann, 2001, 2005) regardless sometimes of actual demonstration of skills. Secondary standardized testing contributes to the social construction of struggling readers through the assignment of static deficit labels (e.g., below basic reader, fifth-grade-level reader), which imply that uniform skill manifests reliably across many instances of reading. Furthermore, these labels spur much school- and district-level action—scheduling students into intervention classes, purchasing district-wide intervention curriculum (e.g., Read 180 [Hasselbring & Goin, 2004])—which likely benefit some readers but also serve to reify deficit person-centered categories. Acquiring these labels in school can mean acquiring failure (Mehan, 1996), and indeed, research has shown that being labeled a *struggling reader* was counterproductive for youth's literacy learning (see Franzak, 2006).

Because within-reader perspectives persist, interventions have tended to focus on students through skill and strategy remediation (Learned, Stockdill, & Moje, 2011; Waber, 2010). Even many instruction-oriented interventions (see Torgesen, Houston, Rissman, & Decker, 2009) have rested on the premise that individuals' skills required remediation. Student-focused interventions may not only neglect the important roles of contexts (Moje, Dillon, & O'Brien, 2000) and texts (Lee & Spratley, 2010), but also risk overemphasizing the role of skill and strategies in literacy learning. Strategy instruction,

although effective (Palincsar & Brown, 1984), is less productive when it happens as a means unto itself (McKeown, Beck, & Blake, 2009) or absent attention to building knowledge (Palincsar & Schutz, 2011) and enacting productive literacy identities (McCarthey & Moje, 2002).

Despite the static and unidimensional perspectives undergirding many reading interventions, studies have shown variation in students' literacy practices and competency across home and school settings (e.g., Alvermann et al., 2007; Black, 2006; Heath, 1983; Leander & Lovvorn, 2006; Mahiri, 1994; Moje, 2000). Other studies, although fewer in number, have suggested that struggling readers demonstrated varying reading practices, skills, and identities across different content area classrooms (Dillon, 1989; Hall, 2007; Ivey, 1999). If secondary readers are more and less proficient across different school spaces and times, then more research is needed to understand how instructional and social contexts mediate reading. This line of research will encourage a multidimensional view of reading by documenting how students and school personnel construct and navigate contexts in ways that mediate the demonstration of skill and struggle.

Complicating notions of context and deepening understanding of its dynamic relationship with youths' reading will contribute to new ideas for how teachers and other school personnel can work with students to construct school contexts that support students' learning. The following kinds of questions require more attention in research and practice. What is the role of contexts in leveraging students' literacy identities, knowledge, skills, and practices across secondary classrooms? What is the relationship between contexts and classrooms? When and why do contexts appear to bolster literacy

learning? What is the role of power in the construction of literacy learning contexts? Who has authority to fundamentally shift contexts for literacy learning? Although this line of research could be viewed as romanticizing students' identities, undervaluing the role of skill and knowledge, or reifying disciplinary differences, this work is necessary to explicate why—despite education, sociolinguistic, sociological, and anthropological research—*reading* and *reader* still seem to operate in schools as static constructs pertaining mainly to within-student characteristics.

Research Questions and Design Overview

To study the relationship between struggling readers and secondary school contexts, I conducted a school-year-long qualitative study in which I shadowed eight students identified as struggling readers. I investigated how varying school contexts both within and across class periods mediated youths' reading-related skills, practices, and identities. Specific research questions included the following.

1. To what extent do youth identified as struggling readers vary in their demonstration of reading-related practices, identities, and skills in and through different school contexts?

2. What school contexts appear to mediate struggling youth readers' demonstration of reading-related practices, identities, and skills?

    a. What school contexts do youth identify?

    b. What school contexts do teachers identify?

    c. What school contexts do I identify?

3. Why and how do the identified school contexts appear to mediate struggling youth readers' demonstration of reading-related practices, identities, and skills?

In the initial ethnographic phase of the study, I engaged in open-ended observation and interviewing to identify dimensions of school contexts that appeared particularly important in mediating youth participant's reading. In the subsequent structured phase, I used protocols to gather confirming and disconfirming evidence for the identified contexts and ways they mediated reading. In total, I observed over 425 hours shadowing struggling youth readers across reading, math, and history classes. I also conducted 64 interviews with students and teachers, administered student questionnaires, and collected reading assessment and achievement data, behavior and attendance records, classroom artifacts, and photographs of school spaces. Throughout the year, I used Constant Comparative Analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) in iterative rounds of coding to identify themes and patterns across data sources. I wrote theoretical memos that linked data to relevant theory and empirical research and created key linkage charts that identified connections and divergences among the central constructs under study.

Key Constructs

The research questions and analysis hinge on complex constructs including *reading*, *struggling reader*, and *context*. Because these terms have been varyingly theorized across the social sciences, I briefly define them and discuss the definitions' analytic implications.

Reading

By *reading*, I mean the skills, practices, and identities related to reading (Stockdill et al., in progress). For example, in a mathematics class, skills might involve decoding multiple symbol systems while reading a linear equation. Practices might include referencing text/notes while completing a problem set. Identities may involve the extent

to which a student enacts a confident persona as a mathematics learner and contributor during group discussions. Reading, in this multidimensional sense, happens in the interaction among the reader, the text, and the activity situated in a socio-cultural context. Instead of foregrounding only one aspect, for example reading identity, I maintain a complex theorization of the term throughout my analysis.

Struggling reader

By *struggling reader*, I mean youth who are identified or labeled as having reading difficulty and the identities that may be ascribed or enacted as a result of that identification (Alvermann, 2001; Franzak, 2006; Hall, 2007). Studying struggling readers, however, presents not only a dilemma of terminology but also of theory and analysis. The theoretical and analytic dilemma concerns who I count as struggling and how I understand reading difficulty. *Struggling* reader can refer to students with identified learning disabilities, students with low reading standardized test scores but without disabilities, and students who teachers identify as having difficulty. To what extent is the nature of the difficulty experienced by students with and without identified disabilities similar or different? For the purposes of this study, I delimited participant selection to young people without special education services, which I describe in Chapter 3. However, I ground this study in a theoretical stance that individuals with and without identified disabilities can struggle in similar ways with school reading. Indeed, a reading problem is better framed as one of adaptation to school literacy demands than as a specific skill deficit (Waber, 2010). This perspective does not deny the existence of neurologic or genetic differences, but it does shift the focus from diagnosing the skill deficit to diagnosing—and better understanding—the contexts through which youth have

difficulty. This conception of struggle foregrounds the ways proficiency and difficulty manifest in the interaction among contextual features (Lipson & Wixson, 1986) rather than ways struggle exists as a fixed, inherent trait. Given my understanding of learning and reading difficulty, I draw on literature from various areas including literacy, special education, psychology, and anthropology.

Another terminological dilemma involves using person-first language. To write *struggling readers* foregrounds the struggle. To write *youth who have difficulty with school reading* foregrounds the youth as people, which of course they always are first. Throughout my dissertation, however, I sometimes use the term, struggling reader, because it is rhetorically economical and because it is a term used in schools, research, and policy. Even while using the term *struggling reader*, my intention is to complicate and problematize deficit notions of reading struggle and to encourage a perspective that foregrounds students as young people instead of static uniformly skilled readers.

Context

By *context*, I mean interactionally constituted environments (Erickson & Schultz, 1997). These environments or networks are constructed by not only interactions, but also by associations and relationships among actors and with the tools actors use to make and extend meaning throughout and beyond their networks (Latour, 1987, 2005). As such, contexts are always under construction, ever-changing, and multifaceted, and contexts never act as containers for events. The contexts of schooling may include, for example, student-teacher relationships, instructional activities, classroom management approaches, and class scheduling processes. Students, families, teachers, administrators, and other school personnel jointly construct contexts at the same time that they participate in and

interact among them. These complex and co-constructed contexts dynamically mediate literacy learning (Moje et al., 2000).

Because context is an expansive construct that could plausibly include countless dimensions, I reviewed adolescent literacy research to consider how, when, and why school contexts had been shown to mediate youth literacy (e.g., Hinchman & Zalewski, 1996; Leander & Lovvorn, 2006; Moje, 1996; Wortham, 2006). I provide a thorough overview in Chapter 2, but I mention it here because this body of work informed my initial conceptions of context (see Table 1.1). I understood these dimensions of context not as mutually exclusive, but as overlapping in dynamic interaction.

Table 1.1

Possible Key Dimensions of Reading Context

Possible Dimensions of School Reading Contexts— Looking Across Class Periods and Classrooms
Time of day
Peers in class
Relationships between teacher-student and student-student
Participation structures
Organization of classroom space
Identity positioning at work
Extent to which classroom culture and instruction are culturally responsive
Extent to which classroom culture and instruction bridge everyday and school knowledge
Ways of talking and knowing valued in class, particularly regarding talk about text
Disciplinary knowledge domain and practices / Content area
Purposes for reading
Texts (e.g., genre, complexity)
Tracked or inclusive nature of class
Grade level
Teacher
Curriculum and instruction, particularly regarding literacy

Empirical and theoretical perspectives informed my understanding of school contexts at the onset of the study. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 show how my findings both supported and departed from Table 1.1.

Conclusion

A study of the interaction between youths identified as struggling readers and varying school contexts extends literacy research in at least three ways. First, as I have discussed, research has shown how contexts mediate readers in out-of-school settings (e.g., Alvermann, 2001; Alvermann et al., 2007; Black, 2006; Dowdall, 2009; Heath, 1983; Jacobs, 2006; Leander & Lovvorn, 2006; Lewis & Fabos, 2005; Mahiri, 1994; Moje, 2000), but less research has examined secondary school contexts (e.g., Hinchman & Zalewski, 1996; Moje, 1996; Moje, et al., 2004). This study contributes to an understanding of why and how school literacy contexts vary, to what extent different actors contribute to variations in context, and how those variations mediate readers.

Second, researchers have examined many different kinds of support for struggling secondary readers—specialized instruction and computer-assistance (e.g., Hasselbring & Goin, 2004) as well as motivation support (Guthrie & Davis, 2003)—but less research has examined how school contexts mediate and support struggling readers. This study contributes to an understanding of how and why school contexts matter for readers who struggle and how contexts might be optimized to support productive reading. On that note, research has shown how contexts support or enable overall school achievement (e.g., Anyon, 1981), but more research about context as it relates to literacy is necessary.

Finally, in reviewing the literature, I have not been able to locate studies that examine specifically the relationship between struggling high school readers and varying

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school contexts. In this study I followed the same young people across multiple high school contexts to better understand the role contexts played in the multidimensionality of struggling readers' practices, skills, and identities. As I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, the ultimate contribution of this research is twofold: (a) It problematizes reified labels that encourage static perceptions of reading struggle, skill, and identity that position youth in deficit ways, and (b) it contributes to knowledge for reshaping literacy learning contexts in ways that benefit all young people.

CHAPTER II

Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives

For this study of how school contexts mediate struggle and success for adolescent readers, I draw on theory and research from multiple scholarly fields to understand context, adolescent literacy, and learning difficulty. Although theoretical and empirical perspectives can vary widely across these areas of scholarships, their contributions, when taken as a whole, support the investigation of why and how contexts mediate struggling youth readers. In this review, I synthesize research relating to school contexts and struggling youth readers, articulate in what ways this study will extend current research, and map out a theoretical framework for conducting my investigation.

I begin with a primarily theoretical discussion of context in which I address how actors participate in and construct contexts through interactions and how contexts, in turn, mediate individuals' actions and interpretations. Because I did not locate an extant theory of context that could by itself explicate the relationship between school contexts and struggling readers, I articulate a theorization of context by drawing on theories of context (e.g., Erickson & Schultz, 1997; Latour, 1987), human interaction (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969), and power (e.g., Bourdieu, 1991; Foucault, 1972).

This theoretical grounding, then, anchors the remainder of the literature review as I discuss a broad spectrum of empirical research that is commensurate with my

theorization of context. I do not delimit the review to studies that explicitly investigated context and learning—particularly the constitutive nature of interactions and the mediating role of power—because to do so would omit a vast amount of relevant research. Synthesizing work with a variety of research agendas and theoretical perspectives, I show how each study contributed to our understanding of the relationship between contexts and learning. I first discuss studies from across the social sciences that have foregrounded context in explanations of learning difficulty. Next, I discuss research on the role of school and out-of-school-time contexts in adolescent literacy learning highlighting studies of school contexts and struggling youth readers.

Ultimately, I demonstrate that (a) more research is needed to closely examine *how* and *why* school contexts mediate literacy learning for struggling high school readers, and (b) I articulate a theorization of context that I used to address this research gap with my dissertation study. I conclude by summarizing my theoretical framework rooted in theories of context, sociocultural perspectives on the context-dependent nature of learning struggle, and adolescent literacy research on the role of context in literacy learning. Figure 2.1 provides a roadmap for the theoretical and empirical perspectives discussion.

Figure 2.1. Overview of Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives Discussion

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                    │    Theorizing context   │
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    │ context and      │        │        │ context and      │
    │ learning         │        │        │ adolescent       │
    │ difficulty       │        │        │ literacy learning│
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    ┌───────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
    │ Theoretical framework for investigating school     │
    │ contexts and struggling youth readers              │
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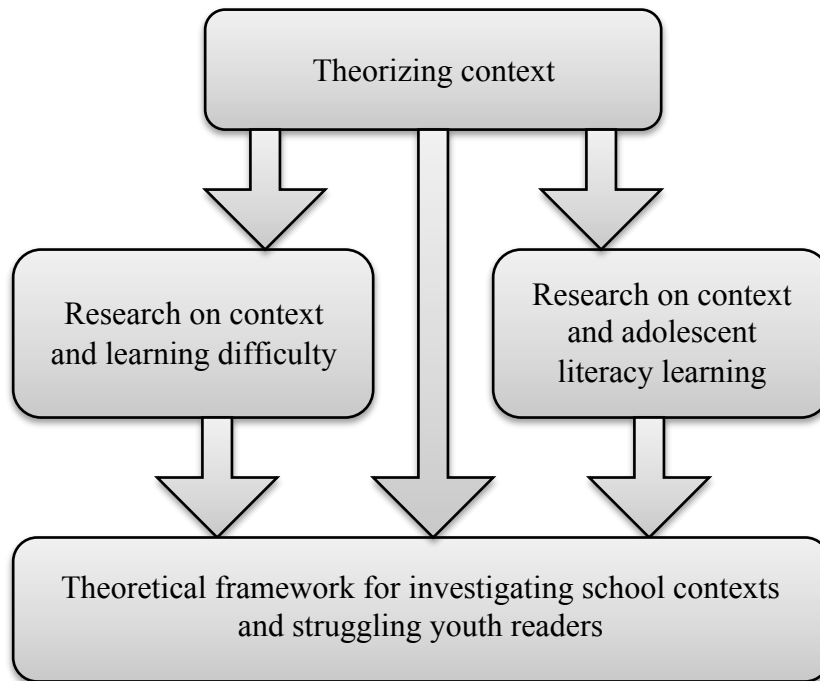
Theorizing Context

My theorization of context conceptualizes actors' interactions as avenues for
making meaning and constructing contexts. Although contexts do not exist separate from
the human interactions that constitute them, contexts also mediate interactions. Among
complex social networks, every individual can express power, and those expressions

manifest unpredictably even as institutional arrangements or dominant sociocultural norms may privilege the practices and dispositions of individuals in particular groups more than others. Unlike power, authority cannot be expressed or harnessed by all actors, but is imbued to particular individuals by virtue of their official positions in networks. In sum, this conceptualization allows me to consider how school personnel and youth readers construct contexts, how varying contexts mediate classroom learning, and how power flows among interactions and consequently mediates demonstrations of reading skill practice, and identity.

I next review the relevant tenets of several theories of context, interaction, and power and show how these tenets contribute to a useful theorization of context. Although Latour argued that one must "follow the actors" (2005, pp. 11-12), I also recognize that there is no atheoretical or ideologically neutral place from which to begin a study (Irvine & Gal, 2000). Thus, I offer the following framework with the caveat that it evolved as a result of following the actors and learning from the participants "what the social is made of" (Latour, 2005, p. 11). I take up the evolution of theory throughout the findings chapters and in the concluding chapter of the dissertation.

Theories of Context

Because people create contexts, contexts do not autonomously host individuals or their actions. Indeed, "contexts are constituted by what people are doing and where and when they are doing it…these interactionally constituted environments can change from moment to moment" (Erickson & Schultz, 1997, p. 22). This perspective problematizes not only notions of context that are place-based, but also a conception of context as an isolated interaction. Rather, contexts are socially (i.e., interactionally) construed

environments situated in time and space. Thus, even though contexts are not places, they are associated with the locations of actors (e.g., classroom spaces) and the activities (e.g., small group discussion) or objects (e.g., texts) actors are manipulating. Contexts may change moment to moment, or interactions may propel them for longer stretches. It is difficult to define the edges or boundaries of contexts. Contexts overlap as participants bring to bear their histories of participation in other interactions, and therefore, contexts are inherently multiple. Despite the dynamic and complex nature of contexts, they are not so ephemeral that they have no consequence in social life.

Indeed, Moje, Dillon, and O'Brien (2000) discussed the important role of context (and text and learner) in literacy learning. They described the multiplicity of contexts that mediate learning including, for example, the cultural, linguistic, and instructional contexts of school. School actors build these contexts as actors interact among events, times, and places. There is never "one learner, living in one context, making meaning of one text" (Moje, Dillon, & O'Brien, 2000, p. 176). Thus, defining school contexts as one bound thing is problematic, and in order to explicate how teachers and students participate in and construct contexts—and how contexts mediate literacy learning—a complex theoretical model is necessary.

I suggest one such model is Latour's (1987; 2005) actor network theory (ANT). Latour argued that associations and interactions among actors form networks. He rejected place-based notions of context or context-as-container perspectives. Rather, the focus of ANT is on the ways that movements, circulations, and interactions among people and objects constitute contexts that may transcend space and time. Leander and Lovvorn (2006), whose study I discuss in detail later, used ANT to show that a literacy

network/context was not place-based; it involved the circulation, movement, and interaction of people and texts across spaces and times. Because I shadowed youth across different classroom spaces, I was susceptible to inadvertently adopting place-based notions of context, and ANT supported me to instead trace associations, relationships, and interactions that transcended classroom spaces. ANT's "main tenet is that actors make everything, including their own frames, their own theories, their own contexts…" (Latour, 2005, p. 147). That is, contexts do not exist outside of actors' interactions, and thus ANT affords a close analysis of interactions and how interactions constitute networks.

Latour focuses on both human and non-human objects in networks. From his perspective, agency is distributed across people and things, and objects, although they do not act alone, have agency as tools in the hands of actors. Some have interpreted ANT as ascribing agency to the objects themselves, and I do not read Latour in this way. In the tradition of symbolic interactionism (SI) (Mead, 1934; Blumer 1969), I argue that people make meaning and interact with non-human objects, but the non-human objects do not have meaning or act by themselves. For example, a struggling secondary reader demonstrates agency when she resists class participation and pulls a hat down over her eyes, but the hat itself is not agentic. The hat, from my perspective, is a non-human object with which the student and the teacher make meaning (potentially quite different meanings), and the hat may serve to mediate a literacy event. The hat, however, is not an actor. Thus, I marry SI's perspective on non-human objects with ANT's conception of dynamic, actor-driven contexts.

In following actors' interactions and associations, ANT problematizes the notion that there are strict hierarchies of contexts ranging from micro to macro or local to societal. In regard to literacy, Leander and Lovvorn (2006) argued that ANT helped disrupt the sometimes dichotomous rendering of literacy as either entirely locally situated or entirely decontextualized. Employing ANT to trace circulations and interactions of text and people across spaces and times, they argued, can account for "the ubiquity of particular social literacy practices, especially those of schooling," while also accounting for the local situatedness of practices (p. 295).

For my purposes, tracing school-based interactions helps explain to what extent and why struggling readers might enact a relatively consistent range of skills, practices, and identities in a one class period over time but a somewhat different range in a different period. Despite the fact that students (and school personnel) have power to interact in different ways and create many kinds of contexts, "There are limits to the range of options for what can appropriately happen next" (Erickson & Schultz, 1997, p. 24). By tracing interactions, it is possible to explicate why a predictable range of contexts might occur in a given classroom space without resorting to a hierarchical model in which macro contexts unidirectionally shape micro contexts.

If "people in interaction become environments for each other" (McDermott, 1976 in Erickson & Schultz, 1997, p. 22), then it is necessary to deeply understand the role of people's interaction in contexts. To do so, I next turn to a theory of symbolic interactionism. How do individuals' interactions taken together constitute contexts, group life, social processes, or institutions? How do contexts mediate individuals' choices, identities, and positioning, even while individuals construct contexts?

Theories of Interaction

     I draw on symbolic interactionism (Mead, 1934; Blumer 1969; Woods, 1992) to examine how youth interact among different dimensions of context (e.g., peers, texts, participation structures) and how those interactions lead young people to make meaning with texts and to understand themselves as literate beings. Dillon (1989) and Moje (1996) used SI to study adolescents' literacy learning in school contexts, and their studies inform the way I take up the theory. (I discuss each study in detail the next section.)

     Three assumptions undergird symbolic interactionism: (a) humans act toward objects on the basis of the meanings the objects have for them, (b) meaning is derived from and arises out of social interaction, which involves the interpretation of symbols (e.g., language, gestures), and (c) meanings are modified through an interpretive process (Blumer, 1969). Social interactions are not only the site for meaning making, but also the means by which meaning is made. Meaning, then, is a "social product...formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact" (Blumer, 1969, p. 5). For my purposes, struggling secondary readers are always active constructors of meaning, which is contextualized and made possible through their interactions; meaning does not reside wholesale in texts, in curriculum, or in instruction for youth simply to pick up or internalize.

     Adhering to another core tenet of symbolic interactionism, I assert that people act as agents, and objects serve to mediate human action. (Note that this stance counters a notion that non-human objects can have agency, and therefore, agency can be distributed across people and things (Latour, 2005). According to SI, the meaning objects have is socially derived; that is, objects have meaning based on how an individual interprets and

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understands the object. The same objects can have different meanings for different individuals, thus, mediating human action in varying ways. For example, the ways a text mediates enactments of literacy learning (difficulty) depends, in part, on the meaning and the associations a young person has made with the text. Objects are not only physical (e.g., texts, chairs), but also social entities (e.g., students, principal), and abstract notions (e.g., moral principles, ideas) (Blumer, 1969). SI, then, affords an examination of the meaning that youth make (rather than meaning ascribed by a teacher or by school norms) with various kinds of objects that may influence their enactments of reading skill, identity, and practice. Equally important, SI also supports the examination of how teachers and administrators make meaning of youths' reading skills, identities, and practices.

Lastly, I draw on SI's notion of individual agency. Blumer (1969) emphasized the important role of an individual's action in the construction of a collective or social process. He stressed that **"**a network or an institution does not function automatically because of some inner dynamics or system requirements; it functions because people at different points do something, and what they do is a result of how they define the situation in which they are called to act" (p.19). Although he acknowledged that the interpretations and meaning making in which individuals engage is influenced by larger group norms, he stressed that "it is the social process in group life that creates and upholds the rules, not the rules that create and uphold group life" (p.19). This theoretical perspective means that school contexts do not simply happen to struggling youth readers; youth act on and help shape contexts, navigating supportive and constraining elements.

In summary, SI supports the close analysis of youths' interactions with various dimensions (or objects) of school contexts and the ways those interactions help make possible youths' particular understandings of texts and of themselves. What SI does not explicate as well, however, is the role of power and privilege in interactions. Particular kinds of interactions and ways of understanding are privileged in schools, which contribute to how and why some youths have difficulty (or are identified/positioned as having difficulty) with school reading. To understand the role of privilege and positioning in contexts, I turn to theories of power.

Theories of Power

The theories of context and interaction I have thus far reviewed do not explicitly account for how power relations mediate interactions (and thus meaning-making) or the construction of contexts. What is the role of power in defining *reading struggle* and positioning individuals or groups as proficient/struggling? How do students and teachers harness power to position themselves and others or to resist positioning? In schools, particular literacy practices and ways of knowing—marked in part by sanctioned/privileged discourses and texts—are afforded higher status, while other literacy practices go unacknowledged or are actively discouraged. Thus, youths whose home literacy practices do not align well with school literacy practices can be viewed as deficient or deviant (Heath 1983).

Moreover, schools may be organized in such a way as to require that some learners are positioned as deficient because proficiency cannot exist absent a point of comparison (McDermott & Varenne, 1995). Learners from ethnic and linguistic minority groups have been disproportionately identified as having difficulty because deficit

frameworks instantiate a normative view that renders students from nondominant groups as different or deficient (Artiles, 1998). Subsequently, deficit learning labels lead to negative social identities (e.g., struggling reader, bad student, apathetic person) (Alvermann, 2001; Mehan, 1996), which can lead to poor school outcomes (Franzak, 2006). Thus, deficit positioning can thus limit individuals' access to hierarchical social positions both in school and post-secondary opportunities (Compton-Lilly, 2007). However, the same literacy practices that are undervalued or discouraged in school might be valued in out-of-school contexts and, therefore, afford positive status. In this way, the literacy practices—and the interactions and meaning making that constitute them—are always socially situated and embedded in power dynamics. Indeed, critical models of literacy have produced "more complex understandings of literacy, particularly in terms of power relations and the social nature of literacy activity" (Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009, p. 215). Thus examining the role of social contexts in literacy learning necessitates attention to power.

When analyzing power, Foucault (1972) cautioned against posing unanswerable questions such as: Who has power? What do they want? What is their strategy?

> Let us ask, instead, how things work…at the level of those continuous and uninterrupted processes which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviors…we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc. (p. 97).

From this perspective considering the material effects of power has more purchase than trying to uncover the seat of power or the will of the 'powerful.' Indeed, power cannot be

possessed. According to Foucault, it circulates or flows "through a net-like organization," and it never localizes in one person (p. 98). Power is not applied to individuals through a linear cause and effect process. People are vehicles of power as it flows unpredictably through networks of interactions or contexts. To think that of an individual as an object "on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike…subdues or crushes individuals" (p. 98).

Although Foucault described power as flowing among individuals, he also recognized the role of domination over others or authority in the circulation of power.

> One must…conduct an ascending analysis of power, starting, that is, from its infinitesimal mechanisms, which each have their own history, their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics, and then see how these mechanisms of power have been—and continue to be—invested, colonized, utilized, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended etc., by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination (p. 99)

By acknowledging that mechanisms of power are "colonized" and "extended" by forms of "domination," Foucault pointed to the role of authority in complex social networks. An analysis of the movement of power among all actors involves the analysis of mechanisms by which some actors maintain sway in complex "net-like" contexts.

This theory of power productively complicates questions about the role of power and authority in schools. The analytic questions are not: In what ways do teachers have more power than students? Do administrators have power over teachers? How do school personnel subjugate struggling readers? Rather, the questions are: What are the ongoing processes by which learners harness power? When students or teacher express power,

what are the effects? What is the role of authority and how is it maintained? By tracing the flow of power among school actors, its consequences—and thus the role it plays in contexts and learning—become evident.

Even as power moves unpredictably through school networks, school processes have systematically positioned students from nondominant groups and struggling readers in deficit ways (e.g., Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009). Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural capital helps explain the privileging and/or discouraging of reading practices across different networks. Using this theoretical framework, Compton-Lilly (2007) found that what counted as "reading capital"—particular reading practices, identities, and ways of interacting that afforded social status—changed across home and school spaces in the lives of two Puerto Rican families (p. 77). She theorized that home and school spaces represented what Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) called social fields. In every social field, "ongoing struggles contribute to both maintenance and change as people who interact within a social field define, refine, and redefine the shared beliefs and understandings that accompany membership through their display of capital that is valued within that field" (Compton-Lilly, 2007, p. 76). A theory of reading capital—particularly the notion that what is valued as capital changes as contexts change—helps explain that even though all individuals can express power, contexts privilege particular ways of being and doing that advantage individuals who know and choose to enact valued practices.

The extent to which young people have school-valued reading capital (and choose to leverage it) relates to their social identity positions as students. These "positional identities have to do with the day-to-day and on-the-ground relations of power, deference and entitlement, social affiliation and distance—with the social-interactional, social-

relational structures of the lived worlds" (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, p. 127). Social positioning is not unidirectional; schools do not simply have power to exert over youth. Power circulates among all school actors, and young people position themselves—accepting and resisting—social positioning associated with reading capital. However, because particular literacy practices are more valued in schools than other practices, the circulation of power is not evenly distributed among individuals. Although power flows unpredictably, institutional authority and privileged ways of interacting advantage some individuals more than others among school contexts. An examination of power in school contexts requires attention to authority and its role in constructing and preserving privileged discourses.

A Theorization of Context

I began this chapter with a primarily theoretical discussion because I needed to articulate a theory of context to ground this literature review and by extension this study. The various theories of context, interaction, and power that I have discussed are conducive to a model of context. This model supports the perspective that secondary students interact and make meaning as literate young people; those interactions are both constitutive of and mediated by school networks; power flows through students' and school personnel's interactions not as possessions but as expressions; and particular literacy practices and identities (associated with school reading capital) are privileged. This conception of school contexts as dynamic, actor-driven networks through which power circulates supports an examination of how school contexts mediate struggling secondary readers' enactments of reading skills, practices, and identities.

With this theoretical grounding, I now turn to empirical research and other theoretical perspectives on the role of context in learning difficulty and adolescent literacy. I discuss studies commensurate with my theoretical perspective, but I do not limit the discussion to studies that were explicitly framed as investigations of contexts, interactions, and/or power. To do so would overlook important contributions that researchers from various perspectives have made to our understanding of contexts and reading difficulty. My objective is to review research on two broadly conceived topics: (a) the role of context in explanations of learning difficulty and (b) the role of context in adolescent literacy. From these bodies of research—that do not often reference each other—I synthesize what we know about the role of context in adolescent literacy difficulty. I conclude by articulating a theoretical framework that marries my theorization of context with empirical findings related to my research questions.

Context and Learning Difficulty

As discussed earlier, reading occurs as the interaction of the reader, the text (Rumelhart, 1994) and the purposes and activities (Snow, 2002) embedded in specific contexts (Scribner & Cole, 1981). This model was used by Lipson & Wixson (1986) to explain reading disability and difficulty and later used by the Rand Reading Study Group (Snow, 2002) to explain reading comprehension for all readers. To understand how young people read and the extent to which they experience difficulty or ease in a given situation, the context must be examined in conjunction with the reader and the text. Despite ample research supporting an interactional model of reading, however, literacy studies have tended to foreground the reader and the text instead of context. Before I review studies of adolescent literacy and context, I first review research from other

disciplines—anthropology, psychology, and special education—that examined the role of context in learning and learning difficulty. These context-dependent explanations of learning difficulty, which largely take a sociocultural perspective, broaden the theoretical and empirical foundation of this study and help me begin to consider how networks mediate the demonstration of literacy difficulty.

In foregrounding context, scholars from varying disciplines (e.g., Cole & Trauppman, 1981; Poplin, 1988; Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998; Vygotsky, 1993) have opposed explanations for learning difficulty that characterize deficits as within-person, fixed traits. These scholars, while recognizing neurologic or genetic differences among learners, stressed the interactive nature of learning and emphasized, to varying degrees, the social and cultural factors that define notions of difficulty and struggle. From this perspective, learning difficulty is productively understood as situated within particular contexts and particular social arrangements. Theories of context-dependency that explicate learning difficulty or disability can be organized in terms of the *localness* of context—ranging from immediate and local to sociopolitical and institutional—under examination. (For a more thorough discussion of sociocultural and cognitive science perspectives on learning difficulty, see Stone and Learned (in press).

Some scholars have examined the ways that learning difficulty and disabilities are made apparent by particular, immediate contexts. Cole and Trauppman (1981), for example, studied the case of Archie, a child diagnosed with learning disabilities involving problems in memory, attention, and reading. The researchers created an experimental condition in an after-school cooking club and analyzed Archie's behavior across school and club contexts. In the club setting, Cole and Trauppman argued that Archie did not

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look like a child with a disability even though he misperceived spoken words, misnamed words, and had difficulty reading. Archie compensated by being persistent, recruiting human resources (i.e., peers) to help with reading tasks, and planning activities well. School assessment environments, particularly for special education qualification, were designed to test a child individually, which made it nearly impossible for Archie to tap these strengths. Cole and Trauppman underscored that Archie's reading and language problems did not disappear in the club setting, but because he could leverage other strengths to compensate for his disability, Archie seemed like—and, indeed, was—a more motivated, engaged, and active learner. Cole and Trumann concluded that the ways learning difficulty manifest and the influence those difficulties can be seen to have on a child's learning depend on the local context, and therefore, it is unhelpful to think of individuals as having fixed, inherent attributes. Ultimately, the researchers stressed that context and interaction shape how individuals engage in cognitive activities.

Other researchers have argued that learning difficulty happens in the *interaction* between an individual and various contextual factors (e.g., Lipson & Wixson, 1986; Waber, 2010). As discussed, Lipson and Wixson (1986) conceptualized reading disability as occurring in the interaction among the text, the reader, and the reading activity. An interactionist view, they argued, affords an understanding of "reading disability because it predicts variability in performance within individuals across texts, tasks, and settings" (p. 120). From this perspective, a reader's performance indicates what she can do under one set of conditions rather than assuming a fixed set of ablities. Therefore, they argued, the need to identify "disability" is eliminated. Lipson and Wixson (1986) ultimately called for reading research to "move away from the search for causitive factors within the

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reader and toward the specification of the conditions which different readers can and will learn" (p. 111).

More recently, Waber (2010) took a similar approach arguing that the problem of children who struggle in school is not one of specific deficit but one of *adaptation,* and, therefore, the focus must shift from diagnosing the deficit to diagnosing the *interaction* between learners and learning contexts. According to Waber, supporting students with learning problems requires a problem solving approach that takes an ecological (i.e., child-world system) perspective, in addition to discrete sub-skill instruction or remediation. By articulating not only local classroom factors that influence expressions of disability, but also special education policy (e.g., discrepancy approach, response to intervention) that help define disability, Waber's approach employed a more expanded notion of context than seen in earlier interactionist-oriented theories (Cole & Trauppman, 1981; Lipson & Wixson, 1986).

Other scholars have examined the ways learning difficulty and disability are influenced by larger institutional, sociopolitical, and sociohistorical contexts (e.g., Daniels, 2001; Artiles, 2003; Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1998). Building off Vygotskian notions, for example, Daniels (2001) argued that:

> Vygotsky's work provides a framework within which support for pupil learning and the positioning of pupils within specific discourse structures may be explored…. Social relations which serve to mediate processes of individual transformation and change are pedagogic relations. As yet we know too little about the nature and extent of those social, cultural and historical factors which shape human development (p. 175).

Daniels called for a more thorough investigation of social, cultural, and historical factors—namely, institutional factors—that shape notions of human development. Daniels argued that a model of pedagogy reduced *solely* to teacher-child interaction is insufficient because schools are institutions with organized pedagogic practices in which the teacher-child interaction occur. To study the expansive institutional context, Daniels advocated for a post-Vygotskian approach that employs activity theory, a framework for studying the complex roles of actors, objects, and culturally mediated activities in complex human systems (Engestrom, 1987).

Similar to Daniels, Artiles (2003) advocated for an expansive broadening of context in understanding disability and more sociopolitical and sociohistorical analyses of the overrepresentation and inclusion of minority and poor children in special education programs. Artiles asserted that the roles of child poverty and culture remain under analyzed in disability research; the field "rarely considers the historical, cultural, and structural antecedents of systemic link between poverty, race, and disability" (p. 172). As evidence, Artiles identified a virtual silence between the academic literatures on inclusion of students with disabilities into mainstream classes and the overrepresentation of minorities in special education. That is, the literature on inclusion does not address issues of racial diversity in the implementation of inclusive models. Because students of color are overrepresented in special education, Artiles argued that research on inclusion efforts must address more carefully and systematically the roles of race, ethnicity, and culture. Therefore, Artiles called for a closer integration between research on overrepresentation and inclusion and argued that such integration would foreground broader, complex notions of cultural context in the explanation of disability and disproportionality.

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In contrast to the silence Artiles identified, some scholars have foregrounded the institutional and cultural context so much that they describe the existence or expression of learning difficulty as the result of social and cultural positioning (McDermott & Varenne, 1995; Mehan, Hertweck, & Meihls 1986). Unlike the other context-dependency theorists who focused on the individual and ways her ability might be seen to vary across settings, social positioning theorists take a cultural approach to explaining learning difficulty and disability. The *cultural approach* of McDermott, Goldman, and Varenne (2006) captures well the orientation of many social positioning theorists.

> A cultural approach to LD (learning disabilities) does not address LD directly but instead addresses arrangements among persons, ideas, opportunities, constraints, and interpretations…that allow or even require that certain facts be searched for, discovered, measured, recorded, and made consequential as label relevant. (p. 13)

> Using a cultural approach, anthropologists McDermott and Varenne (1995) conducted a hallmark ethnography examining the constructs of ability and disability and suggested that these were not objective, self-evident categories. They coined the phrase culture-as-disability, which refers to how "every culture, as an historically evolved pattern of institutions, teaches people what to aspire to and hope for and marks off those who are to be noticed, handled, mistreated, and remediated as falling short" (p. 336). They argued that disability is thus created by and through culture and resides neither within individuals, nor in the difference or mismatch between cultures. Disability exists in necessary opposition to ability because *able* people cannot exist absent a point of comparison. Furthermore, they argued that in American schools, "failure is always ready to acquire someone," and by design of the normal curve, "it absorbs about half the

students along the way" (p. 344). When students acquire failure in schools, Mehan (1996) argued that they also acquire lexical labels such as *struggling reader* or *learning disabled*, which propels the construction of disability and the subsequent production of ability identities. According to these scholars, deficit identities are generated by cultural contexts and make possible, even spur, the expression of learning difficulty.

Though the *localness* of context varies from immediate and local contexts to cultural and institutional contexts in these explanations of learning difficulty, what is consistent among them is an emphasis on ways contexts can leverage individuals' strengths to compensate for, mitigate, or, indeed, even erase learning difficulties—or, conversely, to exacerbate struggle and make apparent learning difficulty. This body of work highlights the multiple ways context can be conceptualized: context as social arrangement (e.g., peer groups), space (e.g., classroom), activity (e.g. cooking), time (e.g., out-of-school time), culture (e.g., school culture), relationship (e.g., teacher-student relationship), discourse (e.g., pedagogic discourse), as identity positioning (e.g., struggling reader). As this research demonstrates, context is multidimensional and dynamic, operating at many 'levels,' and thus as Latour (1987; 2005) attested, context is never one bound thing. Yet, to be able to say anything about contexts, a researcher must operationalize and define *context*. Whatever definition a researcher settles on likely enables (and masks) ways contexts can be seen to support, interrupt, and make possible expressions of learning and learning difficulty.

For my purposes, this collection of research demonstrates the complexity of context and the myriad ways it mediates learning and learning difficulty; the importance of articulating a precise definition of context; and the necessity of using a theoretical

model dynamic enough to explicate the relationship between context and learning difficulty. In reviewing this research, I hope to situate my study in a multidisciplinary body of work that has problematized notions of within-person deficits and foregrounded context in explanations of learning difficulty. This study will extend research by explicating when and why one sample of adolescents identified as struggling readers—an age group not frequently studied in this line of research—experienced difficulty and ease in their literacy learning as they moved across and interacted with varying school contexts.

I next discuss empirical research that has examined the role contexts play in adolescent literacy learning. Then, I narrow the scope to review a smaller body of work that has examined school-based contexts and adolescent literacy difficulty.

Context and Adolescent Literacy Learning

Overview of Adolescent Literacy

To understand the role of contexts in youth literacy learning, one must first take note of the current landscape of adolescent literacy practice and research. In some ways, the landscape is dire. Fourth graders in the United States score among the highest in the world in reading, but by tenth grade American reading scores are among the lowest of industrialized nations. (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2007). Complicating the picture, however, is that many students enact sophisticated, competent literacy practices in out-of-school contexts (Alvermann, 2001; Alvermann et al., 2007; Black, 2006; Heath, 1983; Leander & Lovvorn, 2006; Mahiri, 1994; Moje, 2000). One recent study showed that lower achieving youths demonstrated moments of effective reading with both *school* and choice texts underscoring that youths did not have uniformly low skills even with regard

to school literacy (Stockdill et al., in progress). Thus, although many adolescents test poorly on traditional measures of school reading achievement, there is evidence that many young people, to some extent, enact reading practices/skills and have literacy knowledge that might be leveraged to advance school literacy learning.

Advancing school literacy is indeed important because it serves a gatekeeper to school success and later post-secondary opportunities. However, despite valid concern over low performance on standardized tests of literacy, fervent attention to test scores—along with efforts to either problematize or endorse testing—may have counterproductive effects. One such effect is a *discourse of crisis* in adolescent literacy (see Moje, 2000) fueled, in part, by policy and media. Rochelle Gutiérrez (2008) warned that achievement "gap-gazing" encourages the concretization or reification of testing outcomes rather than a critical examination of the conditions under which disparities in test performance occur. A discourse of crisis is also likely to contribute to the generation and reification of deficit labels. A label such as, *low achieving* points to poor performance on traditional measures of literacy achievement. *Learning disabled* hints at inherent cognitive processing deficits. *Marginalized* emphasizes how youths are positioned—and how they navigate social positioning—outside dominant school discourses. I argue that these labels—inside a discourse of crisis—can contribute to a unidimensional view of reading, which promotes conceptions of learning and learning struggle as within-reader and, in turn, makes student-focused interventions the logical remediation. The persistence of a unidimensional perception may explain why adolescent literacy research has tended to focus on the reader rather than on contexts for reading (and writing). Nonetheless, studies

of context, though relatively few in number, have contributed greatly to our understanding of the relationship between contexts and youths' literacy learning.

Studies of Context and Adolescent Literacy Learning

I group this research into studies of out-of-school contexts and studies of school contexts. Whether literacy practices are fundamentally different across contexts and whether school/out-of-school contexts are too dichotomous a rendering are points of debate. After all, when young people are in school, they are still band members or car aficionados or daughters, and in this way their school and out-of-school contexts overlap. Thus, trying to understand the role school contexts play in students' literacy learning requires a perspective that students are always first *young people* who wear many hats while interacting among and constructing multiple contexts, and the research on youths' literacy in out-of-school settings encourages such a perspective. Still, I differentiate the studies into two camps because research has shown that the same young people who struggled with school literacy used literacies proficiently in many out-of-school contexts to communicate, enact identities, learn, and network. I argue that improving school contexts—ones conducive to the bridging home and school literacy knowledge and practices—merits increased research attention. Therefore, the weight of the review leans towards studies of school contexts. I begin with a brief discussion of out-of-school literacy research. Next I discuss school-based adolescent literacy research, and I end by narrowing the scope to discuss studies of school contexts and struggling youth readers (and writers). This is not meant to be an exhaustive review but, rather, to illustrate the significant contributions made by studies of school and out-of-school contexts.

Out-of-school contexts and literacy. In a hallmark study of home and community literacy practices, Heath (1983) showed how three different communities in the American South developed different literacy practices involving oral language, reading, and writing that were valued and useful in their communities but that did not consistently align well with literacy practices valued in schools. Heath argued that the mismatch between home and school literacy practices positioned some students, particularly African Americans from low-income communities, to be viewed deficiently in school settings and their myriad literacy practices and skills to go unacknowledged or, worse, marked as deviant in school. Heath was one of the first to demonstrate that the extent to which literacy practices had social purchase shifted across home and school contexts. In this way, Heath explicated that school notions of proficiency were not only contextualized but also imbued with power dynamics relating to race and class. Being able to enact the school-valued literacy practices associated with Heath's white, middle class participants—what Compton-Lilly (2007) referred to as having school-based reading capital—afforded school proficiency.

Whereas Heath focused on the match or mismatch between home and school literacy practices, more current work has focused on close analysis of out-of-school literacy practices. Moje (2000) studied youths who were affiliated with gang life and documented how they used literacy practices (e.g., tagging, graffiti writing, poetry, journal writing) to claim space, construct identities, and create social positions. In the social context of gang-connected life, youths enacted competent, socially valuable literacy practices. Youths have also enacted proficient literacy practices in virtual contexts. Black (2006) showed how an online fanfiction site served as a space for an

adolescent English language learner to enact evolving literacy identities and to develop English reading and writing skills. During the youth's long-term participation on the site, she also discursively constructed a strong transcultural identity through the literacies and cultural perspectives she and other fans brought to the site. Other out-of-school studies have demonstrated that young people read frequently and read multiple kinds of texts (Alvermann et al., 2007; Moje et al., 2000), and they participated in a range of competent literacy practices (Mahiri, 2004; Moje et al., 2000). This body of work problematizes perceptions that adolescents, particularly those identified as struggling or resistant, uniformly avoid reading or have difficulty enacting literacy practices.

Studies of out-of-school literacy have also productively complicated notions of context showing how contexts overlap and mediate youth literacy in complex ways. In an after-school reading club, Alvermann, Young, Green, and Wisenbaker (1999) found that adolescents' perceptions of and ways of talking about texts were shaped (and helped to shape) societal and institutional contexts. Similarly, Stockdill et al. (in progress) found that not only did school contexts inform young people's perceptions of texts, but also those perceptions then mediated young people's literacy identities. According to youth, reading the 'right' texts (e.g., novels) made one a 'reader' whereas reading other texts (e.g., poetry, song lyrics) did not. These studies showed that even in out-of-school contexts, echoes of school-sanctioned literacy practices persisted and mediated who young people were as readers and how they understood texts.

Overall, research examining out-of-school contexts and literacy learning has shone a light on youths' strengths and aptitude by highlighting adolescents' pervasive engagement with literacy practices across the many dimensions of their lives. Out-of-

school literacies are, indeed, a valid means unto themselves, and not every out-of-school practice perhaps should be (or could be) incorporated productively into school practices. That said, many out-of-school literacy practices and knowledge could be merged meaningfully with school practices (Gutiérrez, K. D., 2008; Moje et al., 2004) in ways that may deepen literacy learning—and change the nature of literacy learning—in both domains. If this kind of bridging is to happen, we need to know not only about youths' out-of-school contexts, but also about their school contexts for literacy learning.

School contexts and adolescent literacy. Another set of studies have examined the middle and high school contexts in which literacy practices are taught, learned, and enacted. Though not a large body of work, these descriptive, interpretive studies showed the role contexts played in youths' school literacy learning, particularly in "shaping and reflecting learners' identities and subject positions, as well as particular interpretations of texts" (Moje et al., 2000, p. 167). Each study defined and foregrounded particular aspects of school context—instructional activities, knowledge and discourse, social identification and peer groups, teacher-student relationships, and circulation of texts—and how they mediated learning. Taken in concert, these dimensions of context begin to paint a holistic picture of *school contexts*. To varying extents, these studies were grounded in theories of context, interaction, and/or power and inform the construction of my theoretical framework.

Conceptualizing context as instruction, Hinchman and Zalewski (1996) studied the teacher and students' perspectives on reading and reading-related activities in a tenth-grade global-sudies class. They found that the teacher and students had different beliefs about what it meant to be successful in activities and subsequently competing purposes

for engaging reading. Whereas the teacher thought reading to understand was a measure of success, the students believed that earning good grades was indicative of reading success. The researchers concluded that effective instructional contexts needs to respond to youths' purposes for reading and ways in which the purposes influence their reading.

Foregrounding knowledge and Discourse (Gee, 1999) as context, Moje et al. (2004) conducted a classroom-based study of the everyday funds of knoweldge of 30 middle school youths from a predominantly Latino/a community. The researchers identified several funds of knowledge that were associated with home, community, popular culture, and peer groups. These knowledge funds were (or could be) leveraged to create a 'third space' in content area literacy learning—a space in which academic and everyday knowledge come together in ways that deepen school, self, and community learning. The funds of knoweldge—valued differently across home and school settings—were a key context that mediated the youths' literacy learning.

Focusing on social identification as context, Wortham (2006) studied a ninth grade English classroom and showed that social identification and academic learning processes happened interactively. Case studies demonstrated how two students' identities developed in unexpected ways in part because curricular themes provided social categories into which the students fell, while at the same time, students across the class learned curricular themes in part because the two focal students were identified in ways that illuminated those themes. Wortham argued that social identification, or identity models, not only emerged interactionally with academic learning, but also were filtered through local classroom (a collectively developed notion of "promising girls"(p.52) and larger sociohistorical models (a societal model for race and gender, "loud black

girls")(p.164). Thus, the study illustrated how literacy learning is made possible through interaction with local and sociohistorical contexts as well as peer groups.

Moje (1996) conducted a two-year ethnography in a high school chemistry classroom and found that student-teacher relationships were an important context for literacy learning. The teacher demonstrated care for students' learning and integrated literacy strategies in her chemistry instruction. Students, in turn, felt cared for and supported by the teacher, and the teacher-student relationship contextualized the students' literacy practices. That is, literacy practices and strategies were socially constructed during interactions that resulted in meaning-making. Moje reported that the youths did not transfer the literacy strategies to other content area classes. These findings demonstrate the power of the teacher-student relationship to productively contextualize secondary literacy and disciplinary (or disciplinary literacy) learning.

Finally, Leander and Lovvorn (2006) drew on actor network theory (Latour, 1987) to conceptualize context as a connected network bridging home and school spaces. The researchers aimed to move away from place-based notions of context. They showed the dynamic circulation of texts, bodies, and objects through one youth's literacy network, which involved two classrooms and online gaming. Foregrounding texts in their analysis, they demonstrated how particular texts motivated or constrained learning. Although the researchers sought to avoid the dichotomy of school versus out-of-school analysis, many of their findings were presented along these lines. For example, the game as text is contrasted with school notes as texts and the different types of roles each played in the youth's literacy (p. 320). By tracing one youth's literacy interactions across

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multiple networks that transcend space and time, the study contributed a deep analysis of the many settings, purposes, practices, and texts with which the youth engaged.

Each of these school-based studies explicated how and why particular dimensions of school context—instructional activities, knowledge and discourse, social identification and peer group, teacher-student relationships, and the circulation of texts—mattered for youth literacy learning. My study extended this research by examining several dimensions of context simulatatneously and how various contextual dimensions interacted with each other and with readers to mediate enactments of reading skill, practice, and identity. Expanding on the study design of Leander and Lovvorn (2006), I shadowed the same youths across mulitple contexts—content area classrooms—in order to examine the nature of school contexts, the students and teachers who constructed and navigated them, and the interaction among actors and contexts in the service or the distruption of literacy learning.

School contexts and adolescent literacy difficulty. Thus far, I have discussed research that contributed to an understanding of how youths interacted with various contexts for literacy learning, but this body of work did not focus on the school experiences of young people identified as struggling readers (or writers). To that end, I located only three studies about school context and adolescent reading difficulty. If educators and researchers are serious about improving literacy learning opportunities for young people identified as struggling—and if reading happens as an interaction among the reader, texts, activities, and contexts—then more research is warranted in this domain. The final studies I review explored how youth identified as having reading difficulty navigated (and were mediated by) the following dimensions of school contexts: social

organization of classrooms, identity positioning, text choice, and content area. This research, in particular, provided a springboard for my study.

Dillon (1989) conducted a yearlong ethnography in a rural, low-track English-reading class. Using symbolic interactionism, Dillon documented how the social organization of the class bridged students' home language and culture with school in ways that bolstered literacy learning for struggling students. The teacher, Mr. Appleby, acted as a *cultural broker* by helping youths navigate the discourses of school. Furthermore, Dillon showed that Mr. Appleby—in interaction with the students—modified key aspects of classroom contexts (e.g., teacher-student relationships, classroom discourse patterns, participation structures, texts and access to texts) in ways that supported struggling readers to engage in literacy learning. For example, Mr. Appleby made the unconventional move to read aloud novels (e.g., Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*), which on one hand, limited students direct access to texts, but on the other hand, afforded students exposure to texts beyond their instructional level. Regardless, Mr. Appleby changed the contextual *rules* that govern many secondary English classrooms, and the social and instructional organization of his classroom bolstered struggling youth readers' engagement.

Although observing students across classrooms was not the central design or aim of Dillon's study, she did follow some of Mr. Appleby's students into other classes and saw the youth interacting with school contexts in less engaging ways. (Moje (1996) noted a similar shift in youths' literacy practices, though not regarding youths identified as struggling, when she reported that student did not transfer literacy strategies learned in

chemistry to other content area classes.) In the following excerpt, Dillon discussed three

of the students.

> In other classes I observed a different LaVonne, one who was quiet and
>
> introverted—completely the opposite to how she acted in Appleby's class. I asked
>
> her about this and she said she "didn't have anything to say in those classes." My
>
> observations of the participation patterns of Bernard and Melinda in their other
>
> classes were similar to those of LaVonne. Neither of them talked during other
>
> classes…(p. 247).

Because the low-track classroom was the focus of her ethnography, Dillon did not

systematically observe other classroom contexts, but still, Dillon's observations spark

questions about the multiple school contexts experienced by the low-track students. What

were the participation structures, teacher-student relationships, and texts in the students'

other classes? In comparison to other classes, what dimensions of Mr. Appleby's

classroom contexts were particularly supportive of students' literacy engagement and

identities? In general, how did contexts mediate the youth's reading across settings?

Inspired by Dillon's speculations, my study made these questions a focus of systematic

observation and interviewing.

More recently, Hall (2007) conducted a yearlong case study of middle-school

struggling readers. Like Dillon (1989), Hall used ethnographic methods to observe and

interview youth in classrooms. Hall observed three struggling readers, each in a different

content area classroom (but not the same students across multiple contexts). The focus of

Hall's analysis was students' literacy identity enactments, and she concluded that in each

context, struggling readers strategically used silence to mask their literacy difficulty, to

appear more skilled, or to listen and learn from peers. Hall's study sparks questions about *how* the different contexts encouraged the different purposes for silence and how the contexts, more broadly, mediated middle school readers' identities.

Similar to Dillon (1989) and Moje (1996), Hall (2007) briefly noted observations made of one reader across contexts. In English class, the student, Michelle, felt confident she could read and understand assigned literature texts, volunteered during discussions in class, and engaged overall in the class. In contrast, "when Michelle enters her biology class, the context changes. In biology, Michelle feels confused by what she reads in her textbook. She often does not understand the assignments or discussions that are connected to text" (p. 134). Consequently, Michelle rarely volunteered or spoke in biology. Because Hall did not systematically observe Michelle or other participants across contexts, she was not able to analyze why and how contexts mediated readers, but her study prompts important questions. Why can struggling readers look like, indeed be, different kinds of students and literate beings across school contexts?

Ivey's (1999) investigation of middle school readers begins to answer this question. Different from Hall (2007) and Dillon (1998), Ivey examined readers across content areas and expanded the analysis to include not only struggling readers, but also average and skilled readers. Each middle school student had only two teachers because teachers were responsible for multiple content areas (similar to an elementary model), and Ivey conducted the majority of the study in Ms. Brooks's language arts block. Ivey found that each middle school student demonstrated a range of reading skills and dispositions depending on the content area, texts, and purposes for reading, and her findings challenged struggling reader labels in the middle grades.

Building on work, what is the role of school contexts for high school students? What are the literacy demands of navigating a complex high school schedule when, for example, students move across seven content area classes each taught by a different teacher in a different classroom with different texts and purposes for reading? More research is necessary to understand why, at the high school level, Dillon (1989) observed "a different LaVonne" across classroom spaces (p. 247). To what extent is LaVonne's experience shared among struggling readers? When and why do youths' interactions with secondary contexts support literacy identities, foster reading practices and skills, and leverage what young people know and can do?

Summarizing the Theoretical Framework

In summary, a multidisciplinary body of work has examined the contextual nature of learning difficulty. Another body of work, adolescent literacy research, has considered the role of context (school and out-of-school) in literacy learning. Little research from either field has examined the importance of school contexts for struggling youth readers. In studies that did examine struggling readers, the reader tended to be foregrounded rather than the context, and researchers tended to observe young people in the same setting, with the same teacher and peers, teaching and learning within the same content area. Although a teacher and students construct many contexts within the same class period over time, research suggests that the contextual changes across classroom spaces mediated struggling youth readers in potentially more significant ways than varying contexts within the same class period. Moreover, although adolescent literacy research has examined varying middle school contexts, additional research was necessary to understand how complex high school contexts mediated readers. Hence, I designed a

shadow study of eight struggling high school readers across multiple classroom spaces. This study addressed another research gap by closely examining how and why multidimensional contexts mediated reading.

I situated my study in a tradition of work that has explored the context-dependent nature of literacy struggle (and skill), and I sought to extend what adolescent literacy researchers have learned about context and the role it plays in youths' reading identities, practices, and skills. Thus, this study was grounded in sociocultural perspectives of learning and literacy (Scribner & Cole, 1981; Street, 1994). I understood secondary reading as the enactment of practices, identities, and skills, with skills and identities always embedded in and mediated by social literacy practices in which people engaged for specific purposes. Conceiving of actors' interactions and associations as constitutive of networks or contexts (Latour, 1987), I traced students' and teachers' interactions to document school contexts. Even though contexts do not exist apart from the individuals who create them, I took the perspective that contexts mediate actors even while actors construct contexts (Blumer, 1969). Thus, I treated individuals and contexts as separate but related entities and examined how they existed in dynamic relationship with one another (Sawyer, 2002).

A theory of power as flowing unpredictably through individuals' interactions— not as a possession but as an expression (Foucault, 1972)—helped me consider how students and teachers were vehicles for power through complex school networks. Therefore, I asked not "Who *has* power in schools, and what do they want?" but rather "What are the processes by which power manifests in schools, and what are the effects of power?" This theorization of power supported a view of students (and school personnel)

as active constructors with power and agency. Despite young people's inherent power, however, particular social and cultural practices, preferences, and dispositions are privileged (Bourdieu, 1991), and thus the extent to which a young person commanded school-based social and cultural capital (including school-valued literacy practices) afforded varying positions of privilege across school contexts. These theories relating to power and privilege helped me study the consequences of students' expressions of power and the extent to which they were similar and different from the effects of teachers' and administrators' expressions of power. Such an analysis was critical because power relations are fundamentally imbued among school contexts and mediate the literacy learning opportunities of all young people (Gutiérrez, Morales, & Martinez, 2009).

In conclusion, I built a theoretical framework based on relevant empirical and theoretical perspectives from multiple areas of scholarship. I viewed literacy learning as a social practice and demonstrations of proficiency of difficulty as necessarily context-dependent. Central to my framework was a robust theorization of context as being constituted by actors' interactions through which power flowed unpredictably. In addition, I accounted for the role of privileged practices and institutional authority in mediating social interactions. This framework afforded a complex investigation of ways contexts mediated struggling youth readers' enactments of reading skill, practice, and identity—and how readers simultaneously constructed and navigated school contexts.

The focus of my study was on youths' skill, practice, and identity as outcomes. In subsequent chapters, although I do not attempt to make large-scale generalizable claims, I argue that this theoretical framework—coupled with a sound research design—allowed me to make causal inferences about how school contexts helped shape participants'

reading skill, practice, and identities. As a result, I was able to seriously consider how secondary schools (including their contexts, interactions, and power relations) can be reorganized to improve learning opportunities for students who have difficulty with school reading.

Research Questions

As I discussed in Chapter 1, to study the relationship between struggling readers and secondary school contexts, I conducted a school-year-long qualitative study in which I shadowed ninth graders identified as struggling readers. I investigated how varying school contexts both within and across class periods mediated youths' reading-related skills, practices, and identities. Specific research questions included the following.

1. To what extent do youth identified as struggling readers vary in their demonstration of reading-related practices, identities, and skills in and through different school contexts?

2. What school contexts appear to mediate struggling youth readers' demonstration of reading-related practices, identities, and skills?

   a. What school contexts do youth identify?

   b. What school contexts do teachers identify?

   c. What school contexts do I identify?

3. Why and how do the identified school contexts appear to mediate struggling youth readers' demonstration of reading-related practices, identities, and skills?

CHAPTER III

Research Methods and Design

Theoretical frameworks

I approached this study with a sociocultural perspective on learning and literacy. Reading occurs as an interaction among a reader, text (Rumelhart, 1994) and purposes and activities (Snow, 2002) situated in particular contexts (Scribner & Cole, 1981). As such reading skill or struggle is neither fixed nor a possession of the reader. For struggling readers, then, difficulty (and proficiency) varies as texts, activities, and contexts shift (Lipson & Wixson, 1986). I grounded my research methods and design in commensurate perspectives.

To study the relationship between school contexts and struggling youth readers, I designed a study to trace youths' interactions across ever-shifting networks through which power flowed unpredictably and particular school-based literacy practices were more valued than others. My theorization of context—undergirded by theories of interaction, context, and power—had specific methodological implications. First, in accordance with symbolic interactionism (SI), one key arm of my theoretical framework, I grounded my inquiry in the empirical world understudy, which means I examined "the minute-by-minute, day-do-day social life of individuals as they interact together, as they develop understandings and meanings, as they engage in "joint action" and respond to

each other...." (Woods, 1992, p. 348). To accomplish this, I conducted an extensive qualitative study over the course of a school year in one high school. I shadowed eight struggling high school readers across their school days. This design afforded long periods of observation "to follow the actors" (Latour, 2005, p. 12) across classroom spaces and times thereby supported an ecologically valid investigation of school contexts.

In addition to (a) studying directly the empirical world, the methodological implications of symbolic interactionism (SI) also included "(b) maintaining long-term involvement in contexts to reveal layers of reality, (c) taking the role of the other, (d) situating the interaction in the context wherein the interaction occur, (e) studying interaction as a process, (f) researching the self (Mead, 1934), and (g) contextualizing the interaction by drawing connections between individuals' interactions in a specific context and the society in which the context is embedded" (Woods, 1992, as cited in Moje, 1996, p. 177).

SI's methodological approaches overlapped and complemented the methodological implications of actor network theory (ANT) (Latour, 2005). Like SI, ANT also required attention to participants' interaction among (and construction of) contexts ranging from local to institutional and societal (Leander & Lovvorn, 2006) as well as participants' long-term involvement in multiple dimensions of contexts. ANT's methodological implications extended SI's by encouraging, particularly, a focus on complexity and controversy. Latour (2005) argued social scientists have become "timid" about the complexity and controversies inherent in networks; he asserted "it's possible to render social connections traceable by following the work done to stabilize the controversies" (p. 16).

Whereas SI's supported examination of social interaction and (primarily) individual meaning making, ANT's supported examination of social connections/interactions and group/network complexity. Although each theory begins with the interaction or association at the level of the actor, they seek to explain different phenomenon. SI explicates individual meaning (resulting from social interaction) and ANT explicates the constitution of the network (resulting from social associations). Together, they supported a comprehensive examination of context, and they required a similar set of methodological tools to examine interaction and associations.

Tracing power throughout networks involved attention to controversies and how actors sought to stabilize controversies (Latour, 2005). I used a theory of power as flowing through interactions; from this perspective, people served as vehicles for power instead of objects or end-points of power (Foucault, 1973). In addition, drawing on theories of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), I also considered how power dynamics (or the movement of power among actors) was shaped in part by what literacy practices, identities, dispositions, and skills were accorded more valued than others in school. Regarding methods, in order to trace the circulation of power—both the tacit and obvious displays—required extended observation of interactions among multiple contexts with an analytic focus both on individual meaning making and network activity.

Blumer (1969) asserted, "methods are mere instruments designed to identify and analyze the obdurate character of the empirical worlds, and as such their value exists only in their suitability in enabling this task to be done" (p. 27). Thus, the methods I used supported deep qualitative inquiry, particularly the systematic collection and analysis of

data from multiple sources over an extended period (Patton, 1990). The methods afforded a close analysis of how actors constructed school contexts on various dimensions and how contexts mediated struggling youth readers' enactments of skills, practices, and identities.

I stored and managed all data on a secure website (CTools) maintained by the University of Michigan.

Research Context

School and community context

I conducted the study during the 2012-2013 school year at Moore High School in Parkville, a medium-size Midwestern city. (Names of all places and people are pseudonyms.) According to the 2010 census, Parkville's greater metropolitan area had a population of about 570,000. Seventy-eight percent were white, 7.4% Asian, 7.3% Black or African American, 0.4% Native American, 3.1% from other races, and 3.1% from two or more races. Identifying as Hispanic or Latino of any race was 6.8% of the population. The percentage of residents living below the poverty level from 2008-2012 was 18.5%. The largest employers in Parkville included a major research university, state government, and technology and health services. Considered a liberal hub in a political swing state, Parkville residents consistently elected democratic officials.

One of America's largest cities, Metropolitana, was two and a half hours away from Parkville by bus or car, and a large regional city, Midwest City, was ninety minutes away. Families from Metropolitana and Midwest City increasingly moved to Parkville for higher performing and safer schools than their cities offered, and this contributed to shifting city (and school) demographics. According to the 2000 and 2010 censuses, the

population grew by the following percentages across these racial and ethnic categories: Hispanic or Latino by 84%, African Americans by 37%, Asian by 42%, two or more races by 47%, and White by 4%. Parkville schools became more culturally and linguistically diverse every year, and the schools had difficulty creating or maintaining equitable learning opportunities for all students. For example, according to a district report on student behavior for 2012-2013, there were large district-wide disproportionalities between suspension and student demographic data. Low-income students made up 48% of the district's population but received 85% of suspensions. African Americans made up 19% of the district enrollment but received 60% of out-of-school suspensions. (I discuss these and related statistics in Chapter 6.)

Moore High School had the lowest assessment scores and highest poverty rate in the district and county, and the state's Department of Public Instruction ranked it at the second lowest accountability rating, "meets few expectations." Moore High enrolled 1,584 students. The school reported that 57.3% of students were economically disadvantaged (i.e., received free and reduced price lunch). Forty-two percent tested at the proficient or advanced level on the state reading assessment, which meant 58% read below proficiency according to state tests. The school reported that 19.8% of student had identified disabilities, and 15.3% were limited in English proficiency. Students' racial/ethnic demographics were as follows: 0.7% American Indian or Alaska Native, 10.7% Asian or Pacific Islander, 13.4% Latino, 30.9% African American, and 44.2% White.

Moore High had a comprehensive high school design in which students attended multiple 55-minute class periods with different teachers throughout the course of one

day. Struggling readers were institutionally identified through multiple mechanisms (e.g., tracked classes, tier one interventions as part of response to intervention programs, reading support classes, special education qualification). A literacy coach managed school-wide identification of and support for struggling readers and served as a key informant helping facilitate my access to the school, teachers, and, students.

Participants. Using a purposive approach (Patton, 1990), I selected eight focal participants identified as struggling readers by the high school. The primary selection criteria included (a) scored below basic or below proficient on district-administered standardized tests for reading, (b) did not have an identified learning disability and thus did not qualify for special education services, and (c) and was in the ninth grade. I also considered the extent to which students had overlapping class schedules, which was possible because reading support classes caused students' schedules to align. Observing clusters of struggling youth readers across multiple classes helped me maintain a focus on the interaction between readers and contexts instead of focusing on one reader. It also allowed me to observe how the same students experienced the same classrooms. Of course, focal participants' classes did not match up entirely, and I also observed single focal participants in some classes. (I include a detailed observation schedule in the subsection on data sources.) I continually strived to remain focused on the interaction between readers and contexts, rather than on the reader alone.

The focal participants were all 14 years old at the beginning of the school year. Two youths identified as African American, two as White, one as African American and American Indian, one as Hmong, and one as Latino. I included both male and female students in the sample. Although the goal of this study was not be to make generalizable

claims about all struggling readers, but rather to carefully consider what contextual shifts

mean for youths' literacy learning and demonstration of skill, I sought nevertheless, to

identify students who represented the variety of types of youth identified as struggling

readers within the school population. For example, students of color were

disproportionately represented among youths identified as struggling readers, and so my

sample reflected corresponding demographics (see Table 3.1). (I include reading

assessment data in Table 3.1, and I describe those assessments in the subsection on data

sources.)

Table 3.1 *Focal Participant Demographics*

Name	Identity			Reading Assessments			GPA	Days Suspended (Days Expelled)	End of Year Academic Status
	Gender	Racial/ethnic self-identification	Home language	SRI Lexile 8th gr	SRI Lexile 9th gr	TORC 9th gr			
Aziza	Female	African	English, Wolof, Mandinka	828	1119	Poor	3.86	0	On track
Janice	Female	White	English	883	887	Below average	1.00	19 (26)	Expelled
Keisha	Female	African American	English	797	755	Poor	1.00	3.5	Not attending
Mai See	Female	Hmong	Hmong	552	642	Below average	3.86	0	On track
Calvin	Male	Lao, Potawatomi	English, Laos	895	822	Average	1.50	18 (50)	Expelled
Evan	Male	White	English	859	1060	Average	0.29	2.5	Not attending
Javier	Male	Latino	English	934	1010	Below average	2.83	0	Credit deficient
Mark	Male	African American, Cherokee	English	820	1262	Average	1.43	0	Credit deficient

I shadowed the focal participants across U.S. history, algebra, and reading

intervention classes. From the focal participants' classrooms, I then selected eight teacher

participants (two history, four algebra, and two reading teachers) and 14 comparative

peer participants (i.e., classmates who teachers identified as highly proficient readers).

The school-wide literacy coach also participated in the study. The teachers and literacy

coach were white. The comparative peers were all ninth graders and included nine white

youths, three African American youths, and two Latino youths.

Although not the focus of my analysis, the comparative peers allowed me to

consider how proficient readers constructed and interacted among the contexts under

study. I considered the similar and divergent ways in which 'struggling' and 'good'

readers participated in contexts and interacted with texts to the extent that it helped me

explicate how contexts mediated struggling readers. Thus, in my analysis, I used

comparative peers as contextualizing data for considering the experiences struggling

readers. For example, a struggling reader's average number of behavior referrals (5.25)

and average number of days missed due to suspension or expulsion (14.9) in comparison

to a comparative peer's average of less than one referral and less than one day missed

(see Table 3.2). (Later in this chapter I address how suspensions influenced data

collection when I discuss my observation schedule.) This comparison helped me consider

how the amount of missed instruction due to behavior management differed substantially

between struggling readers and proficient-reading, high-achieving students. I

subsequently analyzed how contexts mediated struggling readers' positioning as behavior

problems and their demonstrations of 'compliant' or 'off-task' behavior—and how

behavior (or perceptions of behavior) related to literacy learning. Drawing on these and

other examples, in the following chapters I primarily examine focal participants, their

teachers, and school contexts.

I opted to focus on struggling readers (and interactions among them and contexts) because first, as I demonstrated in the literature review, more research is necessary in this domain. Second, proficient readers tend to effectively navigate varying secondary contexts, but we need to know more about how and why struggling readers interact differently than proficient readers with less than ideal contexts. Lastly, optimizing contexts with and for struggling secondary readers may be a largely untapped avenue for reading support in high schools; the majority of intervention efforts focus on the reader. Research studies like this one are necessary to imagine improved holistic supports for youths identified as having difficulty.

Demographics for the focal participants, comparative peers, and teachers/literacy coach differed on multiple dimensions (see Table 3.2).

Table 3.2

Participant Group Demographics

Participant Group	Race/Ethnicity		Gender		Average GPA	Average # of Behavior Referrals	Average # of Days Missed Due To Suspension or Expulsion
	People of Color %	White %	Female %	Male %			
Focal Participants N=8	75 (6)	25 (2)	50 (4)	50 (4)	1.80	5.25 (42 total)	14.9 (119 total)
Comparative Peers N=14	36 (5)	64 (9)	64 (9)	36 (5)	3.21	<1 (1 total)	<1 (3 total)
Teachers and Literacy Coach N=9	0 (0)	100 (9)	67 (6)	33 (3)	N/A	N/A	N/A

Role of the researcher. Throughout the study I acted as participant observer in classrooms. My primary goals were to observe, interview, and collect artifacts, but I will

became involved in classroom interactions to the extent that it (a) ensured my presence did not detract from student learning, (b) aided this study, and (c) students and teachers invited me to be involved. That said I attempted to maintain a friendly outsider role in classrooms so that I could attend to observing instead of becoming heavily involved in the teaching and learning at hand.

However, in September and October, I took a fairly active role helping students with literacy activities in the reading classrooms as I built relationships with potential youth and teacher participants. As I began to shadow youths into their content area classrooms, I took a less active role and primarily observed. I was careful not to inadvertently identify a young person as a struggling reader by observing, interviewing, or helping focal participants more than other students in content area classrooms. In reading classrooms, I was a familiar and frequent visitor establishing trust and rapport with all of the students and teachers. Helping in reading classes was one way to learn about the school and community cultures, to get to know young people, and to contribute positively to the school. Participating in the study was not be pre-condition to receiving my instructional support in reading classrooms.

Because there is "no gaze that is not positioned" (Irvine & Gal, 2000, p. 36), let me make my position transparent. My experiences as a former secondary reading and special education teacher as well as a beginning researcher influenced the questions I asked about literacy, the understanding I have developed about literacy theories, and the interpretations I made while conducting this high-inference qualitative study. I view literacy as a social practice in which people engage for specific purposes in specific

contexts (Scribner & Cole, 1981). Though I made every effort to reduce researcher bias, these experiences and perspectives informed my gaze on the project.

<div align="center">**Research Design**</div>

Overview of design

The study included an initial ethnographic phase and a second structured phase (See Appendix A for an overall timeline.) During the ethnographic phase from September to November, I identified and consented eight focal student participants, 14 classroom peers, eight teachers, and one high school literacy coach. I also collected initial achievement and background data on participants, conducted open-ended ethnographic interviews and observations, built relationships with participants, identified key dimensions of context for study, and designed interview and observation protocols based on open-ended observations and interviews.

During the structured phase of the study from December to June, I used protocols to conduct approximately week-long shadows of each focal participant. Because youths' schedules overlapped, I observed multiple focal participants when students were clustered together. At the conclusion of one shadowing, I used 1-2 days to analyze data, and then I rotated to shadow another student (or cluster of students when appropriate) until I moved throughout the entire sample. Then I started the cycle over again. In total I rotated through the sample three times. During shadowings, I examined how young people and teachers constructed contexts, how contexts and actors' participation among contexts shifted (e.g., varying participation structures, content areas, texts), and how youths' demonstrations of reading struggle and proficiency manifested (e.g., literacy identity enactments, rates of participation, demonstrations of confidence or agency).

In my proposal, I considered identifying only two classrooms—one more supportive and more constraining—for each focal participant and shadowing across only two classrooms for each focal participant, but that may have led to the reporting of hyper-real contrasts. Shadowing youths throughout their school days and weeks was naturalistic and allowed me to observe a range of contexts and interactions. I was able to note similarities and differences, and any strong contrasts I observed were likely real contrasts instead of artifacts of selective data collection.

Also from December to June, I conducted semi-structured interviews with youth and teacher participants, collected reading assessment data, collected classroom artifacts, and took photographs of school spaces.

Throughout the year, but most concertedly in May and June, I shared initial findings and assertions with the student participants and teachers and considered their reactions, revisions, and amendments as a way to bolster the study's validity and reduce researcher bias. I also reduced researcher bias by employing systematic data collection and analysis procedures, which I describe next.

Overview of data sources

Data sources included (a) observations, (b) student questionnaires, (c) interviews, (c) literacy assessments, (d) student records, (e) classroom artifacts, and (f) photographs of school spaces. The participant groups (i.e., focal participants, comparative peers, teachers) associated with each data source varied, and from each source, I collected a specific number of data or collected data for a particular duration of time (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3.

Overview of Data Sources

	Data source		Duration or number	Participant groups involved
1.	**Classroom observations**		Observed 425 hours	All
2.	**Student questionnaires**		Administered 8	Focal participants
3.	**Interviews**	Semi-structured interviews	Conducted 48	All
		Think-aloud reading process interviews	Conducted 16	Focal participants
		Open-ended ethnographic interviews	Conducted ongoing	All
4.	**Literacy assessments**		Administered ongoing	Focal participants
5.	**Student records**	School achievement data	Collected quarterly	Focal participants and comparative peers
		School attendance and behavior records	Collected quarterly	Focal participants and comparative peers
6.	**Classroom artifacts**		Collected ongoing	All
7.	**Photographs of school spaces**		Took 35	None

I analyzed data from each source to discern how youth and teachers participated across varying contexts and to what extent different school contexts mediated students' literacy learning. When possible, I documented how actors' participation in contexts made demands on or offer affordances to youth. Collecting a variety of data provided a holistic picture of classroom life. I triangulated analyses across multiple sources thereby supporting the validity of the findings and helping to reduce researcher bias. I next describe what each source afforded in my analysis.

Observations. Observations afforded a day-to-day, minute-to-minute analysis of the empirical world, which Blumer (1969) suggested is necessary to trace interactions

that result in meaning making and Latour (2005) suggested is necessary to trace associations and relationships that constitute networks. I observed how power dynamics manifested in the classroom (e.g., particular literacy practices being discouraged, ways of reading/knowing being promoted, youths opting out of activities). I identified key dimensions of contexts that mediated struggling youth readers' demonstration of reading skill, practice, and identity.

Conducting over 425 hours of classroom observation, I shadowed each of the eight focal participants across their reading, history, and math classes. Shadow observations lasted approximately three to four days per student. Rotating through the sample, I shadow-observed each participant three times throughout the year, but because focal participants were clustered in the same classes, I observed students and contexts many times. In total, I consistently observed eight teachers in 13 class periods (see Table 3.4).

Table 3.4

Classroom observations

SUBJECT	Reading		U.S. History		Algebra			
TEACHER	**French**	**Knox**	**Robin**	**Talbot**	**Henry**	**Schmidt**	**Dunlap**	**Malloy**
CLASS PERIOD & STUDENTS	3rd Mark Calvin Keisha	7th Evan Javier	4th Mark Calvin Evan Keisha	3rd Aziza	5th/6th Javier Keisha	2nd Aziza Mai See	6th Evan Calvin	7th Mark
	6th Janice Mai See Aziza		2nd Javier	4th Mai See		1st Janice		
				5th Janice				

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For example, during a shadow-observation of Mark, I also observed focal participants, Calvin and Keisha, in Mark's reading and history classes as well as Evan in Mark's history class. During a later shadow-observation of Calvin, I again observed Mark and Keisha in reading and history as well as Evan in Calvin's math class. Though it may appear complex, in practice, maintaining the observation schedule was no more complicated than students and teachers navigating a typical high school schedule.

Repeatedly observing and interacting with students allowed me to build relationships and earn trust among not only study participants, but also other students. The first time I observed in any class, I asked the teachers if I could briefly introduce myself and explain that I was a former teacher conducting a study of high school reading. At the request of the district, I passed out a letter of explanation that students could take home to caregivers and families. I provided the letter in English and Spanish. In both my class introduction and general letter, I framed the study as one of high school reading across different classrooms instead of as a study of struggling readers. Indeed, in content area classrooms, I observed and interacted with all students and focused my analysis on the construction and mediating effects of contexts. Also, I did not want to risk identifying focal participants as struggling readers or reifying struggling reader categories in the school, which may have had negative consequences for youth. Over the course of the year, I became a familiar and unobtrusive presence among ninth grade classrooms, and students and teachers interacted freely with me.

In addition to attending classes, I also attended a biweekly literacy teachers' meeting. The literacy coach led the meetings, and four reading teachers usually attended. In these meetings, teachers discussed district and school literacy initiatives, ongoing

student assessment, and instructional best practices. My role was primarily to observe, but teachers would also ask me how their students participated, read, and wrote in other classrooms. I shared my observations particularly when I thought it would benefit young people's learning or teacher's practice.

As described in the design overview, I began the study with an ethnographic phase from September to November. Approximately 4 days per week, I conducted open-ended observations of four ninth grade reading classes, two science classes, two English language arts classes, four math classes, and four history classes. To choose the content area classrooms, I reviewed the schedules of all of the ninth graders in the four reading classrooms and chose classes in which they tended to be clustered. In addition, I spent time in hallways during passing periods and ate lunch with teachers and students. During these open-ended observations, I identified student participants, identified possible dimensions of context to study, conducted informal interviews with students, teachers, staff, and administrators, and became acquainted with the school and classroom cultures.

As I began to identify and consent focal participants, I adjusted my observation schedule to attend their classes. I ultimately chose to observe consistently in their reading, history, and math classes because it afforded the most overlap in students' schedules and thus more opportunities to observe and interact with focal participants. In November, I began the approximately week-long shadows rotating through the sample. In between shadows, I used 1-2 days to analyze data. In total, I conducted three rotations through the participant sample over the course of the year, but because of overlapping shadows, I saw every focal participant at least once per week (if students were attending).

If a shadow schedule did not allow me to see a student, I attended their reading class at least one time during that week.

If I was conducting a shadow-observation and students missed classes because of illness, truancy, or suspension, I returned to their classes for several days in a row to try to complete the shadow. If a student was absent for extended periods, I postponed shadowing her or him until the student returned to school.

From December to June, during a structured phase of the study, I used an observation protocol, which I initially designed based on previous adolescent literacy research and empirical findings from the ethnographic phase of my study. The protocol was organized around key dimensions of context and key dimensions of readers. Prior adolescent literacy research showed that as students and teachers interacted in classrooms, youths' literacy learning was mediated by the following contexts: culturally responsive social organization (Dillon, 1998), instructional activities (Hinchman & Zalewski, 1996), content area and text choice (Ivey, 1999), teacher-student relationships (Moje, 1996), knowledge and discourse (Moje et al., 2004), social identification and peer group (Wortham, 2006), and text circulation (Leander & Lovvorn, 2006). (I discuss these and other studies in Chapter 2.)

During the ethnographic phase, in addition to finding evidence for these contexts, I found evidence for other school contexts including, for example, behavior positioning, the effects of homelessness, and instructional scaffolding. I organized all of the contexts into five key dimensions of school context: social, instructional, physiological, environmental, and institutional (see Table 3.5). I drew on my definition of reading (see

Chapter 1, p. 7) as well as empirical evidence to identify three key dimensions of a reader: practices, skills, and identities.

Using the observation protocol, I confirmed and disconfirmed my hypotheses about how students' interactions among contexts mediated reading identities, practices, and skills. I initially included many dimensions of context, but through iterative rounds of coding across data sources, I refined and tightened my protocol. Table 3.5 shows my protocol from January 2013, and Table 3.6 shows the data-driven refinement of my protocol by May 2013.

Over time, I eliminated or collapsed categories of context for three reasons. When I found that two contexts were repeatedly warranted by the same data exemplars, I collapsed those contexts into one because analysis showed that they were in fact two categories of the same context. For example, through analysis it became evident that it was not students' physiological strains (e.g., extreme hunger) alone that mediated literacy, but how their stressed states were interpreted through student and teacher's interactions. Thus, in later protocols, I folded the physiological dimensions into the social dimensions, and my final key linkage chart demonstrates how physiological interpretations nested under student-teacher interactions (see Key Linkage Chart, Figure 4.1, Chapter 4, p. 87). In addition, if I could not find sufficient evidence for a context, I eliminated it. Finally, I eliminated some contexts because resources limited the number and kinds of contexts that I could adequately investigate as a sole researcher. In other words, I chose to examine only as many aspects of school and classroom life as I could thoroughly and systematically analyze. Throughout coding and refining the protocol, I

made every attempt to identify (and retain in protocols) the contexts in and through which

participants' interactions powerfully mediated youths' reading.

Table 3.5

Observation Protocol from January 2013

Date: _____   Class period/content area/teacher: _____
Shadow of focal participant: _____
Other focal participants/comparative peers: _____

Key Dimensions of School Contexts		Key Dimensions of Reader		
		Practices	**Skills**	**Identities**
Social	Teacher-student interactions			
	Classroom climate			
	Peer groupings			
	Behavior positioning			
Instructional	Explicit literacy instruction			
	Cultural responsiveness			
	Scaffolding			
	Vocabulary			
	Oral language			
	Discussion			
	Student choice			
	Texts			
Physiological	Hunger and food insecurity			
	Effects of homelessness			
	Health and well being			
	Effects of gang affiliation (e.g., fear)			
Environmental	Class size			
	Time of day			
	Physical design and condition of class			
	Classroom signs and posters			
Institutional	Struggling reader identification and intervention			
	Tracking and de facto tracking			
	State 'report card' / school reputation			
	District/state instructional mandates			
	Behavior policies			

Table 3.6

Observation Protocol from May 2013

Date: _____   Class period/content area/teacher: _____
Shadow of focal participant: _____
Other focal participants/comparative peers: _____

Key Dimensions of School Contexts			Key Dimensions of Reader		
			Practices	**Skills**	**Identities**
Classroom contexts	**Social dimensions**	Teacher-student interactions			
		Classroom climate			
	Instructional dimensions	Disciplinary literacy instruction			
		Scaffolded instruction			
Institutional Contexts	**Reading intervention dimensions**	Struggling reader identification			
		Scheduling practices			
		Literacy initiatives			
	Behavior management dimensions	School culture			
		Behavior policies			

These protocols served as guides to help organize and focus observations. I also recorded open-ended ethnographic field notes to capture instances, events, or interpretations I could not have anticipated.

Student Questionnaire. The questionnaire (adapted from Hall, 2007) helped me get to know focal participants. It afforded analysis of how focal participants reported their school and out-of-school literacy experiences as well as how youths' viewed themselves as readers and students. In an investigation of struggling middle school readers, Hall administered the questionnaire after an initial formal interview, and so the questionnaire

functioned largely to extend what Hall already knew about her participants. I administered the questionnaire (see Appendix B) before the first formal interview as a way to gather initial information about young people's most and least favorite classes as well as their self-perceptions about reading and writing identities and abilities. Focal participants completed the questionnaire one time in November 2012 during reading classes. Reading teachers chose to administer the questionnaire to all students in their intervention classes as a way to learn more about youth; for the purposes of the study, I analyzed the consented participants' responses. The questionnaire took approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

      Interviews. Throughout the study I conducted three types of interviews: open-ended ethnographic, semi-structured, and reading think aloud interviews. Semi-structured and reading think aloud interviews were recorded and transcribed. As with the questionnaire, interviews afforded insight into youths' self-perceptions of their literacy identities and abilities as well as how they made meaning of literacy related interactions during class time. Interviews also allowed me to ask about youths' literacy practices in and out of school and to investigate ways in which school and out-of-school contexts overlapped. In accordance with SI and ANT, interviews permitted close analysis of youths and teachers as actors in school-based networks. To the extent that it was possible, I also used interviews to assess how young people and teachers understood power dynamics relating to literacy learning, but because questions about power and privilege can be sensitive (e.g., asking students about teachers' authority or asking teachers about the school district's authority), I was judicious in how and when I asked such questions.

Semi-structured interviews. In total, I conducted 48 semi-structured interviews: 16 with focal participants (1 per participant), 14 with comparative peers (one per participant), and 18 with teachers (2 per participant). All semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed.

I adapted the semi-structured interviews (SSIs) from the Adolescent Literacy Development (ALD) project (Moje et al., 2008) in which researchers administered the SSI to over 100 middle and high school students over the course of four years. For focal participants, I used observations and students' questionnaire responses to help formulate questions for the first SSI. In interviews with both focal participants and comparative peers, I asked students to reflect on their literacy practices, identities, preferences; self-concepts as readers and writers; and their attitudes towards and feelings about content area classes. I also asked questions regarding the extent to which literacy experiences were the same or different across classroom contexts, how youths experienced literacy related events in varying contexts, and the extent to which different contextual literacy experiences are knit together for students. See Appendix C for the fall and spring SSI protocols for focal participants. See Appendix D for the SSI protocol for comparative peers. Because the interviews were semi-structured, I asked follow-up questions to encourage students to clarify or elaborate. I used the protocol as a guide but remained open to unanticipated themes or information that supported the study. Interviews lasted from 25 to 35 minutes.

In semi-structured interviews with teachers, I asked about overarching class goals, instruction for struggling readers/learners, teachers' perceptions of individual students' strengths and challenges, teachers' interpretations of learning/reading difficulty, and

school-/district-level supports and constraints that teachers experienced. I analyzed the teachers' SSIs in conjunction with the youths' SSIs to identify similarities and divergences among their understandings of classroom social and instructional contexts and how those contexts mediated youth reading and learning. See Appendix E for the fall and spring teacher SSI protocols.

Think-aloud reading process interviews. I conducted two reading process interviews (RPIs) with each focal participant. All RPIs were recorded and transcribed. The RPIs provided information about how struggling youth readers made sense of different kinds of text. RPIs showed when and why youth read with difficulty or ease, what reading strategies they used, and what practices they enacted. These data complemented my observations of youths' skill, strategy, and practice during class time. RPIs allowed me to note the similarities and differences between RPI reading and classroom reading, and I used the data to inform interview questions.

I adapted the RPI protocol from the Adolescent Literacy Development (ALD) project (Moje et al., 2008). The structure of the RPI remained similar, but I used different texts for this study. In the first RPI conducted in the fall, I asked students to read their 'choice' texts from reading classes; these were fiction or non-fiction books students selected from the school or classroom libraries for daily silent reading. In the second RPI conducted in the spring, students read one of two content area texts; these were from the Moore high's ninth grade history and algebra classes. I asked students to choose which text they would like to read. (In only one case did the student remember one of the texts from class, and I asked her to read the unfamiliar content area text.) I intended to use 'choice' and 'content area' texts during both the spring and fall RPIs, but due to time

constraints, I was only able to use one text per RPI. (Because I was also conducting semi-structured and open-ended ethnographic interviews as well as administering literacy assessments, I decided to reduce the duration of the RPI to limit the study's time demands on youth and teacher participants.)

The RPI protocol involved students reading sections of a selected text first aloud and then silently. While reading, students engaged in a prompted think-aloud to talk about how they made sense of the text. I first asked students to skim texts and make predictions. Then after reading an initial section, I asked students to discuss what they were thinking and any difficulties they had understanding the text. If students had difficulty, I asked them what they did to help their confusion. See Appendix F for the RPI protocol.

Open-ended ethnographic interviews. I conducted open-ended ethnographic interview (OEIs) with focal participants, comparative peers, and teachers in an ongoing fashion. I engaged participants naturalistically during class, passing periods, and lunch. Interviews were not scripted, and OEI data helped to flesh out data collected in classrooms as well as extend and/or informed semi-structured interviews. Participants and I discussed a range of topics including classroom experiences, school social life, texts, and hobbies.

Literacy assessments. For each focal participant I collected the following school- and district-administered assessment data: Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) (Scholastic, 2008), ACT Explore (ACT, 2014), Aimsweb (NCS Pearson, 2014), the school's ninth grade writing assessment, and the state reading assessment. In collaboration with a reading teacher, I administered the Test of Reading Comprehension

(TORC) (Brown, Wiederholt, & Hammill, 2009). Reading teachers, with the help of the literacy coach and tutoring volunteers, administered the SRI and Aimsweb assessments quarterly to struggling readers. The literacy coach coordinated a fall and spring writing assessment for all ninth graders. Students took the ACT Explore exam once in eighth and ninth grade, and they took the state math and reading assessment in eighth grade. The reading teachers and I administered the TORC one time in the fall.

These data were important because performance on assessments resulted in ability labels (e.g., basic reader) that informed how youths' were perceived as readers, how they perceived themselves as readers, and how they moved through school-based networks. These data also provided information about youths' reading skills in the context of individually completed assessments, which were used to not only identify reading difficulty, but also monitor reading progress. Therefore, these data provided insight into why participants were continually identified as struggling readers. These data also helped contextualize my observations of participants'' reading skill and struggle in the context of classrooms. I analyzed students' assessment performance in relationship to several dimensions: how students' perceived their reading skills; how they believed others perceived their skills; and how teachers and I perceived their skills. Moreover, I investigated the extent to which different assessments administered in the same time period indicated similar or different levels. I also examined how varying assessments tracked students' literacy learning over time.

Student records. I collected focal participants' and comparative peers' student records, which included quarterly Grade Point Averages (GPA) and behavior records. Behavior records included referrals, in-school and out-of-school suspensions, and

expulsion data. For each incident, the behavior record detailed the time and place, who was involved, the school violation, and the consequences.

GPA data contributed to an understanding of how each participant achieved on traditional measures of school learning. These data will also complement less traditional views of school learning (e.g., enactment of literacy practices and identities), which I analyzed through interviews and observations. Behavior records contributed to an understanding of how often and why youth experienced disciplinary action, how much instructional time youth missed due to disciplinary action, and how teachers and administrators (the authors of the records) interpreted young people's actions and words.

Classroom artifacts. Throughout the year, I continually collected artifacts from classrooms including student work, teacher lesson plans, and texts. I analyzed student work diagnostically to better understand the young people as students and literacy learners. These artifacts helped situate and contextualize my observations and interviews as I developed understandings of how these struggling secondary readers constructed and navigated contexts that mediated their demonstration of reading skill, practice, and identity.

Photographs of school spaces. I took 35 photographs of school spaces including the school welcome center, hallways, cafeteria, classrooms, signs, and posters. Because I did not have permission to photograph or video record participants, I did not photograph people. I analyzed the organization of space, the public display of particular messages via signs posters, and the condition of the physical environment (e.g., clean, dirty, broken furniture) and how they helped constitute the places in which participants interacted to create contexts.

Method of Analysis

To manage a large corpus of data from multiple sources, I designed an overall management system and a systematic analysis approach. I organized and stored data by data source on a University of Michigan CTools site. All transcribed SSI and RPI interviews were stored there. I also organized and archived field notes after each observation. To the extent that it was possible, I digitized classroom texts, artifacts, and photographs (e.g., scanned documents) and stored them after each observation.

I analyzed data within case (each student participant or cluster of participants as a case) and across cases (examining multiple contexts/networks in which students interacted) (Stake, 2006). The within case and across case approach allowed me to analyze both readers and contexts—and the dynamic interaction between the two. When I examined within cases, I identified patterns of change or development for each student with particular attention to how youth constructed contexts and how contexts mediated literacy identities, practices, and skills. When I looked across cases, I attended to ways networks of interactions with particular power dynamics meditated multiple students' reading skills, practices, and identities. Observing the youth across space and time allowed me to consider how changes in context mediated student learning and reading. Equally important, observing the same classroom spaces (e.g. teacher, content area, physical room) across multiple periods with different groups of students, allowed me to consider the extent to which dimensions of classroom context remained similar and different throughout the day and how youth and teachers constructed contexts in particular class periods.

As I present my findings, I use the case of Keisha as a touchstone. Her case serves as a thread through a complex analysis of the relationship between struggling readers and school contexts. Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 begin with a brief discussion of Keisha. I also frequently draw on the case of another focal participant, Mark, albeit to a lesser extent than Keisha's. These two students were representative at a high level of the variability in reading-related skills, identities, and practices that every focal participant demonstrated. Like Keisha and Mark, every struggling reader demonstrated proficient or improving reading at certain points during the study. Choosing to foreground two participants affords a close examination of both the patterns and unique divergences in young people's literacy experiences. (During data collection, I devoted equal time to shadowing and interviewing all of the focal participants.) By returning to Keisha and (less frequently) Mark, I am able to present a series of related data exemplars across assertions-based chapters, which supports a detailed explication of the relationship between struggling readers and changing school contexts. To show patterns evident in the data, I also examine data from the other six participants—Aziza, Calvin, Evan, Janice, Javier, and Mai See—and their teachers.

Constant Comparative Analysis. I used Constant Comparative Analysis (CCA) (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) throughout the study to analyze observational field notes, RPI and SSI transcriptions, field notes from OEIs, and students' responses to questionnaires, classroom artifacts, and student records. (For example of how CCA was used in adolescent literacy studies, see Dillon, 1989, and Moje et al., 2008). I first did open coding to identify emerging patterns and themes. For example, some initial codes were related to key dimensions of school contexts (e.g., social, instructional, institutional);

power dynamics (e.g., behavior positioning, suspension rates); and students' reading (e.g., practices, identities, skills). I strived not to anticipate codes but to systematically identify them across data sources. The students' interview and questionnaire data, in particular, afforded an examination of struggling readers' perspectives of school contexts and the roles those contexts played in their reading. Emerging codes helped generate questions that I investigated in subsequent rounds of data collection. For example, I found through coding that youths' interactions with open participation structures (i.e., students freely called out answers or participated in class discussions without having to raise their hands) appeared to increase youths' contributions in class, so during subsequent observations and interviews, I investigated the role of open participation structures and class discussion in literacy learning. Emerging codes also helped shape my observation and interview protocols.

From open coding, I moved to axial coding. I identified commonly occurring codes across data sources and grouped them into categories. With central categories, I moved into selective coding in which I attempted to link data within and among categories. To do this, I created data charts for each category (e.g., social interactions) in which I listed one of the category's properties (e.g., classroom climate) and recorded evidence from multiple data sources along with an interpretative comment. If I found, for example, that the same data exemplars supported two different properties, I considered whether or not to collapse the two properties into one. If I did not find enough supporting evidence for a property or found disconfirming evidence, I eliminated the property. Table 3.7 and 3.8 show excerpts from the data charts for the properties classroom climate and student-teacher interactions in the category social interactions.

Table 3.7

Data Chart Excerpt for Category: Social Interaction - Property: Classroom Climate

Category: Social Interactions – Property: Classroom Community		
Date	**Data/Evidence**	**Interpretive Comment**
01/18/2012	"I would rather just go to a different class….but you know, give us (students) more compliments and make the class more brighter. The class is dark. You walk in, she (the teacher) just—she just feels, the way she look and the way people feel when they walk in the class. They feel they don't like her. They would not want to be around her at all." -Mark SSI 1	Mark describes Ms. Malloy's Algebra classroom culture as "dark" and negative. He and other students do not want to be in the class. This disrupts their math learning.
02/14/2013	"…with the class, we really worked hard to build this environment where they trusted each other, they trusted me, and that they kind of understand that it's okay that they struggle in math, instead of feeling less able or feeling less confident about themselves…these students have reported to me that they feel a lot more comfortable in this class, they don't feel afraid to share an answer because if they get it wrong, probably the other kids in the class did too, so they don't feel that social pressure….they have started to really build their confidence, that they are capable of math and they are capable of learning new things." -Mr. Henry SSI 1	Mr. Henry (Algebra teacher) discusses his deliberate efforts to create a safe classroom community in which students can take risks and work through math confusion. His goal is that this kind of culture ultimately helps students build confidence in themselves as math learners.

Table 3.8

Data Chart Excerpt for Category: Social Interaction – Property: Student-Teacher Interactions

Category: Social Interactions – Property: Student-Teacher Interactions		
Date	**Data/Evidence**	**Interpretive Comment**
02/27/2013	"During Ms. Malloy's 55-minute Algebra class, the teacher publicly redirected or disciplined a student 59 times." -Field notes	Ms. Malloy initiates a very high number of negative interactions in one period. As a result, her instruction is frequently interrupted, and the number of negative comments far outweighs the positive. Within these interactions, it is difficult for the teacher and student to engage in productive math learning.
12/05/2012	Respondent: the teacher he's really cool. Interviewer: Why is Mr. Henry cool? What do you think makes him cool? Respondent: Well, because we won't always like follow what you're supposed to do, like what the book and stuff teaches, like he shows us like his little tricks that he does and that's making me feel good. … Interviewer: Okay, anything else that makes him cool? Respondent: He's really funny. -Javier SSI 1	Javier describes his positive interactions with Mr. Henry in 5th period Algebra in terms of both instruction and the teacher's humorous style. My field notes corroborate that Mr. H regularly initiates positive interactions and treats students with respect. Students feel respected not only because Mr. H is "cool" and "fun," but because he sets up math learning in ways students can access.

Throughout the study, I engaged in the recursive documentation and reduction of codes that characterized how and why school contexts mediated struggling readers' skills, practices, and identities. Throughout the CCA process, I prepared theoretical memos to link data to relevant extant theory and empirical research and created key linkage charts to identify connections and divergences among the central constructs understudy. In addition, I met with my advisor every 4-6 weeks to discuss data collection and analysis.

As a result of these analyses, I arrived at the following assertion, which I discuss in the following chapters. (See Chapter Four for an elaboration of my main assertion.)

Students', teachers', and administrators' interactions among particular school contexts were especially important in not only identifying reading difficulty but also in constructing 'struggling readers.' These school contexts included classroom-based social and instructional contexts and school- and district-wide institutional contexts. Classroom and institutional contexts overlapped, and teachers and youth constructed and navigated contexts simultaneously. Although contexts (and ways participants interacted among them) did not exist in a strict hierarchy, authority was weighted toward teachers and administrators and the institutional contexts through which school personnel exercised influence. Struggling youth readers also expressed power, but the consequences of those expressions at times had negative ramifications for youth (e.g., refusing to participate in a literacy activity resulted in being sent to suspension). And, although participants' interactions with school contexts bolstered reading at times, struggling readers' experiences among contexts tended to mediate reading skills, identities, and practices in constraining ways. Close analysis of instances when youths' and teachers' interactions among contexts supported struggling readers, which I discuss in subsequent chapters, has important implications for improving secondary contexts for literacy learning.

CHAPTER IV

An Overview:

School Contexts and the Construction of Struggling Readers

Introduction

In this chapter, I present an overview of my findings that demonstrate the ways in which key school contexts were important in mediating youths' reading and constructing struggling readers. Specifically, data analysis showed that as young people interacted among particular classroom and institutional contexts, their reading-related skills, identities, and practices were enacted and interpreted in ways that positioned them, to varying degrees, as struggling or improving readers. Understanding the dynamic role that contexts played in these and other students' learning is necessary for dismantling deficit positioning and opening new avenues for literacy growth in school.

In what follows, I begin by providing an overview of my model for school contexts and the construction of struggling readers. I then introduce a chart that shows key links among findings. Next to provide a frame for the analysis of participants' interactions in the later chapters, I briefly elaborate on how these school contexts, specifically institutional and classroom contexts, appeared to mediate youth reading and identity positioning. Finally, I share a representative case study of one participant to illustrate the range of school spaces across which youth moved throughout the study; the

wide array of contexts that young people helped shape; the variation in reading-related skills, identities, and practices that youth enacted; and ultimately the role that contexts played in reading and identity positioning.

Overview of the Model

Analysis showed that students', teachers', and administrators' interactions with particular school contexts were especially important in not only identifying reading difficulty, but also producing 'struggling readers.' Young people had agency and demonstrated power to construct, negotiate, and shift these contexts as well as to manage their literacy learning experiences, but however unpredictably power may have flowed through complex school networks, authority at Moore High School[1] was weighted towards teachers and school/district leaders (e.g., authority to track classes, administer reading assessments, assign reading-related labels, establish and implement behavior management policies). Students' expressions of power indeed shaped contexts, but they had limited influence over the consequences of their powerful actions. For example, one student protested placement in a reading class. The student expressed power by advocating for the teacher to change her schedule, composing a strongly worded argument for discontinuing reading class during a writing activity, and opting not to participate in reading activities during the first week of school. With limited authority, however, the student remained scheduled in the reading class, and the teacher sent her to in-school suspension for refusing to read.

As students navigated the myriad contexts of schooling, they demonstrated varying reading-related identities, skills, and practices that were read in different ways by
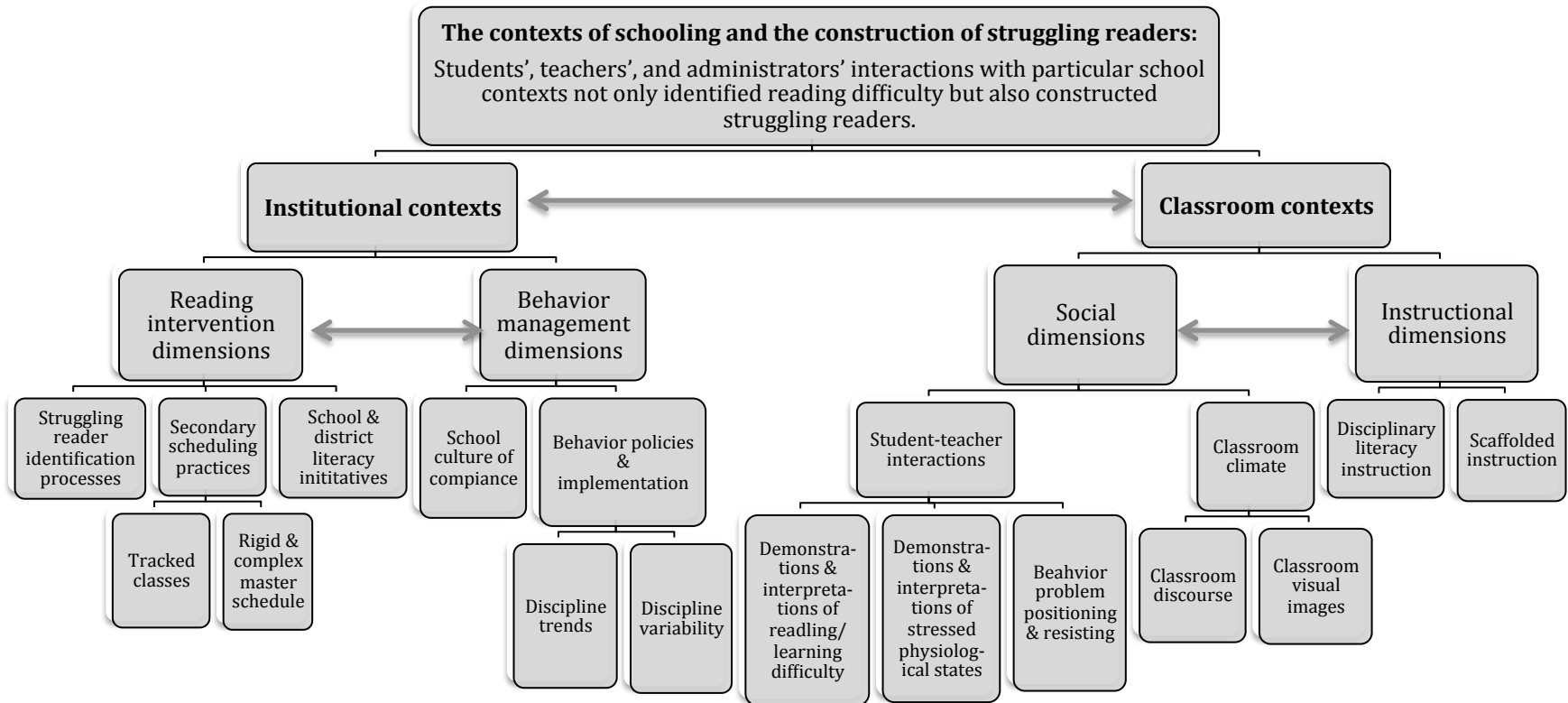
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[1] *All names and places are pseudonyms

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various teachers and school personnel. Within institutional contexts that demanded the reading-related labeling of students, these interpretations of identities, skills, and practices positioned some students as either struggling or successful regardless, sometimes, of actual demonstration of skill. Contexts in which students' identities, skills, and practices, were read as ripe for growth tended to produce successful or improving readers, whereas contexts that positioned students as immutable tended to produce struggling readers. Furthermore, being positioned as or enacting a struggling reader often coincided with other deficit positioning such as a "behavior problem" or "bad kid." Indeed, the balance of participants' experiences leaned toward challenging contexts and deficit positioning.

Through rounds of data analysis, I organized the contexts that were particularly important for youth identified as struggling readers into two analytic categories, classroom contexts and institutional contexts, as illustrated in the key linkage chart (see Figure 4.1). Classroom contexts consisted of both social dimensions (e.g., student-teacher interactions) and instructional dimensions (e.g., disciplinary literacy instruction). I identified these as classroom contexts not because they were place-based or circumscribed by four walls, but because they were constructed in classroom spaces (e.g., 5th hour Algebra) among groups of teachers and students who met regularly and engaged in common work. Institutional contexts (e.g., district literacy initiatives, behavior management policies) were also constructed and enacted in classroom spaces, but they had significant influences from actors and interactions outside of the participants' classroom spaces. Nevertheless, analysis showed that students' interactions with institutional contexts were powerful in labeling and positioning them as struggling

readers. Rather than conceptualize institutional contexts in a hierarchical or distant

relationship with classrooms, I draw on Latour's notion of context as networks of

interactions to explicate how classroom and institutional contexts spanned spaces and

times through chains of associations and relationships.

Figure 4.1. Key Linkage Chart

The contexts of schooling and the construction of struggling readers:
Students', teachers', and administrators' interactions with particular school contexts not only identified reading difficulty but also constructed struggling readers.

Institutional contexts

Classroom contexts

Reading intervention dimensions

Behavior management dimensions

Social dimensions

Instructional dimensions

Struggling reader identification processes

Secondary scheduling practices

School & district literacy inititatives

School culture of compiance

Behavior policies & implementation

Student-teacher interactions

Classroom climate

Disciplinary literacy instruction

Scaffolded instruction

Tracked classes

Rigid & complex master schedule

Discipline trends

Discipline variability

Demonstra-tions & interpreta-tions of readling/ learning difficulty

Demonstra-tions & interpreta-tions of stressed physiolog-ical states

Beahvior problem positioning & resisting

Classroom discourse

Classroom visual images

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Classroom Contexts

Classroom contexts, particularly social and instructional dimensions, mediated how students learned literacy skills and knowledge, how students were regarded as readers and young people, and how students thought of themselves. The classrooms themselves were not contexts; contexts were not places or containers for action. Rather, through interactions, students and teachers dynamically constructed contexts in and across classroom spaces. Classroom spaces (e.g., 5th period Algebra), on the other hand, served as relatively stable hosts for shifting contexts as classroom spaces were constituted by, among other things, a consistent meeting time, a particular group of people, a physical place, a content area domain, and common learning goals and social norms. Because of the relative continuity of class periods, a somewhat predictable range of social and instructional contexts manifested as actors built and maintained communities, routines, and relationships over the course of the school year. So, even though contexts were not fixed within classrooms or synonymous with classrooms, classroom spaces served as anchoring points for the networks of interactions (i.e., contexts). And, even though contexts did not exist outside of individuals' interactions, I drew on a sociocultural perspective that regards contexts and individuals as separate but complexly related entities (Sawyer, 2002). Therefore, I considered both how students and teachers' interactions constructed contexts and how contexts mediated individuals' interactions. Specifically, my analysis focused on ways classroom contexts—and actors' participation among them—mediated demonstrations of students' reading proficiency and difficulty.

Particular social and instructional contexts were especially important for readers identified as struggling. Social contexts that played a pivotal role in mediating

participants' reading included (a) student-teacher interactions related to students' demonstrations of reading/learning difficulty and stressed physiological states (e.g., extreme hunger or fatigue). Specifically, I examine how teachers' interpretations of learning difficulties or strained physiological states mediated instructional decision-making and relationship building. I also consider how students interpreted their own learning challenges and their teachers' perceptions of those challenges. Lastly, with regard to student-teacher interactions, I examine when and why teachers positioned struggling readers as behavior problems and how youth took up and/or resisted that positioning. Also important in socially mediating focal participants' reading was (b) the extent to which classroom climates were positive or negative. Specifically, I examine how classroom discourses and classroom visual images informed classroom climates and, in turn, students' literacy experiences. Instructional contexts that were important in mediating participants' reading included (a) disciplinary literacy instruction and (b) scaffolded instruction.

My analysis showed that considering social and instructional dimensions in tandem helped explain students' proficient/struggling demonstrations of reading. For example, important for struggling readers was the extent to which literacy instruction was present and rigorous and the extent to which instructional interactions were situated in trusting, caring relationships among all classroom participants. In bolstering or hindering students' reading, the interacting effect of trusting relationships and quality literacy instruction was more powerful than either good relationships or good instruction alone. Especially for struggling readers, positive relationships enabled rigorous instruction, and rigorous instruction built trusting relationships. In another example of interacting

contexts, I found that teachers' interpretations of students' reading/learning difficulty were related to the kind of instruction or support teachers enacted. When teachers viewed reading difficulty as a within-student problem, they tended to foreground skill and behavior remediation. When teachers viewed difficulty as context-dependent, they tended to focus on optimizing classroom environments and teaching disciplinary literacy knowledge and skills. In Chapter 5, I draw on multiple data sources to further illustrate these and other examples of classroom contexts and how youths interacted among them in ways that mediated their reading-related skills, practices, and identities.

In summary, the social and instructional aspects of classroom spaces informed one another as participants interacted and made meaning. By considering only the social arrangements, identity enactments, and relationships in a classroom space—or examining only teachers' instructional decisions and curricular programs—I could not explicate why and how young people experienced (or were perceived to experience) literacy difficulty/proficiency. Rather, by systematically examining social and instructional dimensions in concert, I began to explicate how classroom contexts contributed to the construction of struggling secondary readers. To deepen my analysis, I also considered how classroom contexts interacted among and were influenced by institutional contexts (e.g., tracking, district-mandated reading intervention programs, behavior management policies). Although classroom teachers demonstrated power to influence these systems-level contexts, authority was weighted toward the school/district leaders and policy makers who made decisions, for instance, about purchasing curricular programs and implementing policy. Thus, institutional contexts, to some extent, delimited the contexts that were possible in classroom spaces and contributed to the positioning of readers as

struggling. Not a strict hierarchy, however, classroom interactions also helped shape institutional contexts.

Institutional Contexts

Various school and district institutional contexts mediated students' reading-related skills, identities, and practices. Particularly important in constructing struggling readers were institutional processes relating to reading intervention and behavior management. Analysis showed that school actors' interactions across vast spaces and times helped construct an institutional discourse about reading difficulty and problem behavior, what counted as reading struggle and 'bad' behavior, and who became identified as a struggling reader or a 'behavior problem.' This largely deficit-oriented discourse was particularly authoritative because it was supported by both state/district and school contexts.

Specific institutional contexts for reading intervention that were important in the construction of a deficit discourse and, thus, a deficit positioning of readers included (a) struggling reader identification processes, (b) secondary scheduling practices including tracked classes and the maintenance of a complex master schedule, and (c) literacy initiatives at the school and district level. Reading intervention contexts drove the identification and labeling of young people as struggling readers, determined whether or not and what kind of reading intervention classes students would attend (which subsequently clustered youth together across core content classes thereby shaping the social and instructional contexts of those spaces), and created an accountability-driven, high-pressure climate among school personnel charged with supporting struggling readers. Important institutional contexts related to behavior management included (a) the

school culture which emphasized compliance and (b) behavior policies including both trends and variability in discipline policy implementation. Analysis showed that institutional processes for identifying and labeling struggling readers were conflated with school and district processes for identifying and labeling young people as behavior problems. In Chapter 6, I examine closely these institutional contexts and ways they mediated young people's reading and identities.

Supportive and Constraining Interactions Among School Contexts:

The Case of Keisha

I next present a case study of Keisha, a ninth grader identified as having reading difficulty. Like Keisha, every participant demonstrated varying reading skills, identities, and practices during the study, and her case is representative at a high level of the multidimensionality and variability in the students' reading. Across data sources, I identified patterns in the ways youths' reading varied as young people constructed and participated in contexts, and Keisha's case illustrates each pattern (even though not every participant demonstrated every pattern). Close analysis of Keisha's case shows how various dimensions of school contexts mediated her (a) experiences with reading, (b) self-perceptions as a reader and learner, and (c) enactments of (and responses to being positioned as) a student, reader, and "behavior problem." Ultimately, the case shows how school contexts complexly evolved and how students' interactions with these ever-changing contexts contributed to the construction of struggling reader identities. Throughout my dissertation I return to Keisha as a touchstone to anchor a lengthy and complex analysis and as a representative case to illustrate the variability that young people showed as readers and learners.

To build the case, I analyzed and drew on multiple data sources: field notes from regular shadow observations across multiple school spaces; ongoing ethnographic open-ended and semi-structured interviews with Keisha, teachers, and peers; school records (i.e., reading assessment scores, class grades, school attendance, and behavior referrals); and Keisha's school work. Because Keisha's attendance was sporadic throughout the year (for example, she twice missed two-week-long stretches of school to go to juvenile detention), the case I present in this chapter and return to in later chapters reflects the disjointed nature of her school experiences. Keisha's attendance was representative of five of the eight focal participants all of whom missed on average 1-2 days per week including suspensions. (Four participants were no longer attending school at the end of the year, which I discuss in the conclusion of this chapter.) Three of the 8 struggling readers attended school consistently. As I move across data sources in Keisha's case and as I draw on data from other participants in later chapters, exemplars reflect struggling readers' fragmented experiences as they moved in and out of school and across complex secondary schedules.

Next in Keisha's case, I document how two key contexts of schooling—institutional and classroom (i.e., instructional and social)—mediated Keisha's demonstration of reading-related skills, practices, and identities and ultimately the manifestation (or perception) of her reading/learning difficulty and proficiency at different times and in different spaces.

An Introduction to Keisha

Keisha was a highly social ninth grader. She nurtured her many friendships during school time and cultivated an active online network via Facebook and Twitter. Keisha

was 14-years old and African American. She reported reading regularly outside of school and liking L. Divine's *Drama High* series and other young adult fiction by Sharon Draper. Keisha said that she and her mother enjoyed reading the same books and "on Sundays, I…stay in the house and just be reading, me and my momma." During her elementary school years, Keisha lived in Metropolitana, a major American city two and a half hours from Parkville. Keisha explained that her family moved to Parkville to get away from Metropolitana's escalating street violence, "Yeah, everybody's tired of Metropolitana, tired of shootings, tired of their kids dying all the time. Stuff like that. My auntie's daughter just died. She was my age." Parkville offered safer streets and schools, but violence continued to be a part of Keisha's life as she traveled between the two cities and became involved with a Parkville area gang. Keisha's math teacher noted these kinds of demanding life circumstances were "competing against her being academic." The teacher's comment illustrates how an academic identity could be viewed at odds with a student's life circumstances or other identities (e.g., gang member). In the case of Keisha, although there were instances when the reality or possibility of violent interactions outside of school distracted her from school learning, there also were instances when she demonstrated engaged, skillful learning. Regardless sometimes of this variability, teachers' (and administrators') perceptions of Keisha and the extent to which she was "academic" mediated how teachers positioned her in classrooms.

Literacy Intervention and Positioning as a Struggling Reader

Although Keisha engaged socially at school, she often demonstrated less interest and less facility with classroom learning than she did with her social engagements with other students. Her GPA at the end of first quarter during ninth grade was 0.50. At the

beginning of ninth grade, Keisha scored in the poor range on the TORC but in the average range on the SRI with a Lexile of 852 (Scholastic, 2008). According to the eighth grade state standardized reading assessment, Keisha was a "basic" reader. Despite the variability in Keisha's assessment scores, she had been placed in Read 180 since the sixth grade even though Read 180 is designed to be a shorter-term intervention. Moore High School, limited perhaps by the district-adopted interventions and the rigidity of the master schedule, scheduled Keisha for a fourth year of Read180, which surprised and deeply upset Keisha. The following interview excerpt shows how the intervention placement dimmed her excitement about ninth grade and began to undermine her identity as a learner.

> I've been in Read 180 since 6th grade and I need to get out… I was so happy to come up in this school but then as soon as I got my schedule and I found out I had Read180, I just like, I just stopped. I was like, "This is not fair, like, why am I in Read 180?".
>
> …
>
> …like I know how to read. Like, I don't need—I don't keep needing practice because I read at home and all that stuff. Now, like, I don't think I need extra help with reading. I think I have the—I think I have the vocabulary in my mind, like I can sound out words, I can read, I can spell, like I don't know why I need the extra help….I be feeling like I'm slow because I'm in this class, like I'm special.

From Keisha's perspective, the Read 180 placement sent a negative message that she had reading deficits. With agency, she countered that notion by identifying her reading strengths such as reading at home, having word knowledge, and decoding well.

Although she appeared to shrug off a poor reader identity, she did report feeling "slow" because she was placed in the class. Thus, being scheduled into Read 180 for a fourth time appeared to ascribe a poor learner identity that positioned Keisha tenuously at the beginning of ninth grade.

Keisha was not simply unmotivated to be in a reading class. In the next excerpt she acknowledged how Read 180 initially helped her, but after three-going-on-four years of enrollment, Read 180 was hurting her motivation to read.

> (Read 180) helped me in the beginning in 6th and 7th and 8th grade, but I don't know what they're going to accomplish me to do, because I already know what to do…Reading is boring. Reading is boring. Small group is boring to me. It used to be so fun but now it's boring, like I don't want to do it no more.

At Moore High, teachers often discussed the low motivation of many reading intervention students like Keisha. Students were in fact sorted into groups that the administration and teachers labeled "engaged" and "unengaged." Those identified as in need of extra reading support were subsequently scheduled into "engaged" and "unengaged" reading classes. During the high school scheduling process, incoming ninth graders' level of engagement as indicated by eighth-grade teacher reports and test scores was treated as a within-person fixed trait. Keisha, however, offered an alternative explanation of her own lack of engagement by attributing her decreased interest in reading not to an internal or personal state but rather to experiences with a particular curriculum. She articulated how instructional contexts (i.e., reading intervention) and institutional scheduling practices (i.e., Read 180 for a fourth time) had dampened her motivation over time.

Constraining Classroom Contexts and Positioning as a Behavior Problem

Observing Keisha in Read 180, U.S. History, and Algebra throughout the school year, I found supporting evidence that Keisha's level of engagement was indeed not uniform. Her participation and interest in classroom learning varied quite dramatically across different spaces and times. As instructional and social contexts shifted, the interactions Keisha had with those contexts contributed to her construction as a struggling reader/learner or an improving, productive reader/learner. The most notable differences in the kind of reader and student Keisha enacted (and was constructed to enact) occurred in between Keisha's math class and her other classes (i.e., U.S. History and Read 180).

In the history and reading classes, teachers reported that Keisha was "unengaged," a "behavior problem," and potentially even "dangerous." Although I never observed or heard any report that Keisha engaged in dangerous behavior in school, she frequently disregarded teachers' requests to participate in classroom activities and to follow class norms (e.g., put away cell phones). Over the course of the year, she received 15 behavior referrals including three out-of-school suspensions and twice missed school to spend time in a juvenile detention center. Keisha seemed to actively take up a 'behavior' identity as she sometimes boasted about her negative interactions with school administrators and police officers, but she was simultaneously ascribed a 'behavior' identity, sometimes when her actions were similar to those of her peers not identified as having behavior problems. Moreover, Moore High behavior policies served to exacerbate Keisha's acting-out behaviors and identity rather invite Keisha into productive involvement in school.

For example, during the winter, Keisha and two friends left school during afternoon classes. Despite the fact that students were not permitted to leave campus

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during school hours, Moore High's rate was 18.8%, the highest in the district, and it was part of the school culture that many young people regularly skipped classes. For this incident, behavior records said that Keisha was suspended 1.5 days for "ditching class (and) walking down Parkville Avenue. (She) ignored (the) administrator and only came back when school police came." Instead of being a school discipline issue, a fourteen-year-old girl's actions were criminalized by involving a city police officer assigned to Moore High. Furthermore, the consequences of her action resulted in out-of-school suspension, which accomplished what Keisha had wanted in the first place—to miss school. Suspended students were told to stay home and complete work packets provided by their teachers. In practice, however, teachers reported that students rarely completed that work, and some teachers never compiled packets. Thus, missing class days and instruction further positioned students such as Keisha on the margins of mainstream social life and school learning.

In another example, Keisha was ascribed a behavior identity when her actions were similar to her peers'. One day before the bell rang to begin reading class, Ms. French said sternly, "Keisha put the cell phone away. I'm not going to deal with it today. I'm serious. Put it away." On that particular day, three other students walked into the room using their cell phones, but the teacher only reprimanded Keisha. Other students pointed out that Keisha was being singled out, and Keisha was angry about it. When negative student-teacher interactions like this occurred—interactions that positioned Keisha as a behavior problem particularly at the beginning of a period—they set a tone for the remainder of class in which Keisha felt defensive and annoyed, and she was less likely to participate. Ultimately, in Read 180 and U.S. History, Keisha's interaction with

classroom social contexts (e.g., teacher-student interactions) and instructional contexts (e.g., Read 180 curriculum, predominance of teacher lecture in U.S. History) in addition to institutional contexts (e.g., intervention placement processes, behavior policies) contributed to her construction as a struggling reader and a behavior problem.

Supportive Classroom Contexts and Positioning as a Learner

Not all of Keisha's classroom experiences were negative. The contexts that occurred during Keisha's math class—and the ways she participated in and helped construct those contexts—mediated her reading practices, skills, and identities in productive ways. Before examining the contexts of math class, it bears noting that the institutional processes that shaped Keisha's math class were different from the ones that shaped the history and reading classes. First, unlike Keisha's history teacher, her math teacher, Mr. Henry, volunteered to teach a low-track class. Mr. Henry, who had seven years of teaching experience and was white, felt strongly about building class community, helping students feel "safe to take risks in math," and supporting students to "experience more success in math than they had in previous years."

The math class differed from history and reading classes on other dimensions as well. As part of a new intervention effort, the high school math department asked eighth grade teachers to recommend incoming ninth graders who demonstrated math learning difficulty but not behavior problems. The resulting intervention class capped enrollment at 15 students and met daily for two class periods. Although the low teacher-student ratio benefitted Keisha and her classmates, it made other algebra classes slightly larger according to Mr. Henry. Moreover, barring some students from double-block algebra because of reported behavior problems likely contributed to those students' deficit

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positioning in other classes. This exemplar illustrates how well intentioned supports for some students contributed to burdens on other students and teachers among complex secondary school contexts. Despite the questionable wide spread value of the math class, I closely examine the contexts that Mr. Henry and the students created—and how those contexts mediated Keisha's mathematical literacy—to explicate how contexts bolstered Keisha's learning.

Mr. Henry's math class was successful on several dimensions. According to Mr. Henry, the majority of students showed significant gains on the ACT EXPLORE standardized test for math and demonstrated increased confidence and autonomy in their math learning throughout the year, which was corroborated by my field observations. Mr. Henry attributed the effectiveness of the class to institutional factors such as having a double block to provide two hours of daily math instruction, having a low student-teacher ratio, and vetting student enrollment with eighth grade teachers to avoid scheduling students with a history of behavior problems. Keisha echoed Mr. Henry's point about the double block when she said "having math for two hours, that's good. Like, it really did help..."

The social and instructional contexts cultivated by Mr. Henry and the students also appeared to contribute to the productivity of the class and to Keisha's more positive student identity in math class. Whereas the history and reading teachers described her as "unengaged," "behavior," and "dangerous," Mr. Henry described her in the following way:

> …She actually learns things pretty quickly. I think that she's been in a
>
> circumstance in the past where again, somehow she was allowed to quit on things.

Because when we really like get her, when we get her linked into what we're

doing, she is an all-star. But if she is disengaged, then you get just nothing. It's

like trying to squeeze water out of a rock.

Mr. Henry was the only teacher (of three teachers interviewed) who identified a learning

strength for Keisha. He acknowledged that she struggled with motivation, but by

acknowledging past "circumstance" in which Keisha was "allowed to quit on things" and

by using the word *disengaged* instead of *unengaged*, Mr. Henry recognized engagement

as a temporary/changeable state for Keisha, not a permanent aspect of her constitution.

He also recognized his role ("when we get her linked into what we're doing") in building

a context of engagement, connection ("linked in") and success ("she is an all star").

In terms of student-teacher interactions, Mr. Henry regularly praised students for

doing well more often than he disciplined or redirected students for being off-task. In one

representative class, he praised students eight times and redirected students five times

compared to a class in which Keisha's history teacher praised students two times and

redirected 19 times. During field observations Mr. Henry regularly demonstrated

curiosity about students' thinking, made positive assumptions about students' intentions,

and treated students with respect. In an interview, he explained that building trusting and

caring relationships with students was important in supporting their learning.

I think if you have kids that have a teacher that they feel like they have an honest

relationship with and that there is trust and genuine care both ways, that they try

harder, that they're more engaged…

Students reported feeling understood by Mr. Henry. One young woman said, "He

gets us, and we get him." Several students said that they appreciated that Mr. Henry

listened to what they had to say and that he joked around with students. Notably, both the students and Mr. Henry discussed positive social contexts in connection to positive instructional contexts. Keisha said, "We do math and then we have like our little fun time talking to each other and then we get right back to math. It's like a little thing—but, we still get our work done." The fact that Mr. Henry brought students "right back to math" and did not solely focus on fostering interpersonal connections seemed important to Keisha. She reported learning math more effectively in ninth grade than in previous years. Similarly, Mr. Henry discussed the importance of trusting, caring relationships in connection to academic learning. He explained,

> I've had situations, like with the stuff we're doing on systems. Honestly, I had to tell them, "I know that this is super boring right now, but can you trust me that you just need to know this?" And they're like, "Yeah, Mr. Henry. Okay," and they'll do it, and I think that's because of the relationship that I've built with them. They know that I'm not going to make them do something just to do it. If I'm asking them to do it, they must really need to because I've built that trust that I don't waste their time.

Mr. Henry's social and instructional goals were intertwined. His aim was not to be friends with students or simply to have students feel good about themselves. He cared about students as young people *and* as math learners. Students responded positively to his teacher stance that respected both their personhood and their student identities, and together participants in the class constructed supportive social and instructional contexts for learning.

Moreover, Mr. Henry enacted highly effective instruction with a focus on mathematical literacy and carefully scaffolded teaching. To facilitate mathematical literacy, Mr. Henry explicitly taught students to use mathematical language, navigate multiple representations of mathematical concepts, think symbolically, read and write different symbol systems, interpret mathematical sentences, and defend mathematical answers. In observations, I watched Mr. Henry consistently organize instruction around these aspects of mathematical literacy. In addition, he systematically scaffolded instruction and gradually transferred responsibility for learning to students. Keisha explained that math was her favorite class because "I can get my work done, like a lot easier because Mr. Henry breaks it down." Two other students also noted that Mr. Henry "breaks it down" or "shows them the steps" for how to approach mathematical problems. Part of his scaffolded approach was to put students in groups to encourage them to ask and answer each other's questions instead of only coming to him for help, a practice at which they became more adept at doing as the year progressed.

Keisha participated more actively in math than in history and reading. She volunteered to answer questions, asked questions when she was confused, went to the board to solve problems, and worked collaboratively in groups. She tackled mathematical texts and appeared motivated to read and interpret them. Using her cell phone was an issue, but when Mr. Henry would ask Keisha to put it away or give it to him, the interaction rarely resulted in a heated debate or Keisha exiting class, which happened multiple times in both history and reading classes. Thus, the interacting institutional, social, and instructional contexts of the math class mediated Keisha's mathematical literacy learning, and she demonstrated productive reader/learner skills, practices, and

identities more often than she did in other classes. Equally important is the point that through her active engagement, Keisha helped to construct the positive algebra classroom context even as she experienced it.

Conclusion

Keisha's mathematical literacy (and mathematics) learning was not simply a matter of a set of individual skills Keisha possessed (or did not possess). Nor can her learning be explained by a single contextual factor such as a good relationship with the teacher, good instruction, or small class size. Rather, it was the complex interaction of multiple contexts—and her participation in creating these contexts—that made the algebra class a positive and productive space for Keisha in the midst of a ninth-grade experience in which she was often constructed as a behavior and learning problem. That Keisha's reading-related skills, practices, and identities varied across school spaces and times demonstrates the mediated nature of her reading and learning (difficulty) and suggests ways that school contexts might be shifted to support her literacy learning and social development across multiple content areas.

Specifically helpful to Keisha were classroom contexts that prioritized caring, trusting student-teacher relationships in conjunction with explicit, scaffolded disciplinary literacy instruction along with high academic and social expectations. Institutional-level decisions that afforded 'extra' time daily to learn math in a small class setting also supported Keisha. In the following chapters, I show how the variability in Keisha's experiences among classroom contexts was representative of other participants who also demonstrated more and less proficient reading across space and time. I discuss, for instance, how Javier also benefitted through the contexts of Mr. Henry's algebra class

and how Mark, Evan, Javier, and Calvin experienced similar constraints as Keisha did among the contexts of the U.S. History class. Drawing on data from an array of sources, I show how participants' interactions among particular contexts supported literacy learning and social/emotional development while other contextual interactions appeared to not only limit learning, but also position participants as deficit students and young people.

Supporting struggling youth readers is not a unidimensional endeavor. It is not solely evidenced-based reading curriculum, quality instruction, or caring teachers that makes a difference for youth. Rather, how schools are organized, how youth are regarded, and how reading difficulty is understood among teachers, administrators, and students all influence the kinds of school contexts that are possible and, thus, the literacy learning and school experiences that are possible for young people. As I mentioned earlier, of the eight struggling readers who joined the study at the beginning of ninth grade, only four were still attending school regularly in the spring. The trajectories of the youth represented here are telling and offer a cautionary tale about the impact of well-intended literacy policies, curricula, and pedagogies. Two young people had been expelled, and two (including Keisha) had stopped attending due to challenges in and out of school. Similar to Keisha, many were positioned as behavior problems and their literacy learning needs were largely unmet as they navigated limiting school contexts. For example, six of the eight participants were systematically asked to leave classes, serve suspensions, and thus miss instruction. Indeed, due to out-of-school suspensions or expulsion, these struggling readers missed on average 14.9 days of school. The youths who stopped attending school—or attended less and less frequently—did so not because of inherent deficits or self-sabotage. Their loss of motivation and desire to avoid school

was produced by the contexts of school that positioned them as problems. This deficit positioning, coupled with limited support for literacy learning, worked to push youth out of school. Even as school contexts positioned youth in compromising ways, I show how young people often demonstrated resilience, creativity, and an earnest desire to learn.

My analysis showed that the 'problem of struggling readers' or 'the crisis of adolescent literacy' did not reside in the adolescent reader herself, but rather in the interactions among many school actors with the institutional, social, and instructional contexts of schooling. In this study, 'struggling readers' were constructed through contextual interactions, and the literacy learning of young people was hampered by a deficit discourse about reading difficulty and struggling readers.

Despite the patterns I identified and illustrated in Keisha's case, I am not arguing that one 'set of contexts' would have better supported all of the participants in my sample. Rather, I assert that contexts mattered greatly for youth readers, that the balance of many struggling readers' contextual interactions tended to hinder their productive learning and identity enactments, and that promising contexts, when they occurred, made significant differences for how youth engaged in literacy and were positioned as people. I also recognize that the productive contexts I highlighted in this case may not be easily or feasibly accomplished across different classrooms at Moore High or in other secondary schools. Indeed, the organization of many comprehensive high schools makes addressing and reshaping contexts for literacy learning complicated. If schools, however, are to become places in which all adolescents engage in meaningful literacy learning and are valued members of the community, then considering contexts—and how they might be shifted in radical and nuanced ways—is necessary.

In Chapters 5 and Chapter 6, I examine more closely the classroom and institutional contexts of Moore High School in an attempt to uncover how those with authority in schools—teachers, researchers, school leaders and policy makers—could begin to shift classroom and institutional contexts in radical and nuanced ways to invite students to participate more fully in constructing contexts that support student learning. Using Keisha's case study as a springboard, I draw on multiple data sources to demonstrate how participants' interactions among school contexts contributed to, at times, the construction of struggling youth readers and, at other times, to the disruption of deficit positioning and the facilitation of deep literacy learning.

CHAPTER V

Classroom Contexts:

Interactions Between Social and Instructional Dimensions

Introduction

As students moved across classroom spaces, social dimensions of contexts (e.g., student-teacher interactions) and instructional dimensions of contexts (e.g., disciplinary literacy instruction) interacted in powerful ways to mediate students' reading proficiency/difficulty. Particularly important for focal participants was the extent to which literacy instruction was present and rigorous and the extent to which instructional interactions were situated in trusting relationships among all classroom participants. Specifically, when youth identified as struggling readers experienced rigorous literacy instruction embedded in trusting, respectful, and caring relationships, these youth tended to (a) express positive feelings about themselves, their teachers, and their class contexts; (b) engage as motivated and agentic learners/readers; and (c) demonstrate proficient or improving reading-related skills and practices. The interacting effect of trusting relationships and quality literacy instruction powerfully supported youths' reading and learning.

Main Findings Related to Classroom Contexts

In this chapter, I discuss particular social and the instructional dimensions of classroom contexts that teachers, students, and I identified across Moore High School classroom spaces (see the Key Linkage Chart, Figure 4.1, Chapter 4, p. 87). As I defined in Chapter 2, classroom spaces (e.g., fifth hour Algebra) were constructed by, among other things, a specific time of day, a particular group of people, a physical place, and a set of norms, and spaces served as containers in and across which all actors dynamically constructed contexts. In classroom spaces, I found that a somewhat predictable range of social and instructional contexts manifested as actors built and maintained communities, routines, and relationships over the course of the school year.

The social dimensions I examine include (a) student-teacher interactions related to students' demonstrations of reading/learning difficulty and stressed physiological states (e.g., extreme hunger or fatigue). Specifically, I analyze how teachers' interpretations of learning difficulties or strained physiological states mediated instructional decision-making and relationship building. I also consider how students interpreted their own challenges and teachers' perceptions of those challenges. Lastly, with regard to student-teacher interactions, I examine behavior problem positioning and resisting in the classroom. In addition, I examine (b) classroom climate, specifically classroom discourse and classroom visual images.

The instructional dimensions I examine include (a) disciplinary literacy instruction and (b) scaffolded instruction as contexts for literacy learning and identity positioning. Ultimately, I explicate how teachers and students participated in classroom

contexts and how their interactions among those contexts mediated focal participants'

reading skills, identities, and practices.

In the remainder of this chapter's introduction, I discuss the notable influence of

institutional contexts in classroom spaces. I then preview the organization and

presentation of analysis in Chapter 5. Finally, I revisit the case of Keisha, who is a

touchstone throughout the dissertation, to illustrate how her reading skills, identities, and

practices changed across classroom contexts. Specifically, I examine how she

participated in social and instructional contexts and how her participation mediated her

reading. Keisha's case is representative of the fact that all participants demonstrated more

and less proficient reading through social and instructional contexts. Her case illustrates

the patterns that were evident across the sample although not every participant

demonstrated every pattern of interaction.

Influence of Institutional Contexts in Classrooms

Before examining classroom contexts, it is important to note that teachers and

students simultaneously participated in classroom contexts *and* institutional contexts

(e.g., tracking, district-mandated reading intervention programs, behavior management

policies). Although teachers and students had power to influence institutional contexts,

authority was weighted toward school/district leaders and policy makers. For example, a

student could not choose to reject struggling reader identification/labeling or opt out of a

reading intervention class. Even teachers had limited authority to move students in and

out of reading intervention classes once young people were identified as struggling

readers. Thus, institutional contexts to some extent delimited the social and instructional

contexts that were possible in classroom spaces and contributed to the institutional

positioning of readers as struggling. Throughout my discussion of classroom contexts then, I index when actors navigated institutional policies, practices, and systems in ways that mediated classroom-based relationships and instructional interactions.

I present data exemplars that could be interpreted as reflecting poorly on teachers or students. Teachers' interview responses or classroom decisions could be read as unfair or ineffective for focal participants. For example, teachers referred to struggling youth readers as "bad kids" or "behaviors." Ms. Malloy said that seventh period Algebra was her "single worst class in sixteen years," and that she dreaded coming to school to work with "those kids." Taken out of context, one might interpret Ms. Malloy's comments— and the deficit perspective they reflect—as the primary barrier to better learning opportunities for struggling youth readers. A different and potentially more complex analysis, however, could be to consider Ms. Malloy's comments in concert with other teachers' comments. Indeed, I identified a pattern in teachers' comments about the class periods in which I requested to observe—the classes in which struggling readers were clustered. The eight teachers that I approached were enthusiastic about my study and welcomed me into their classrooms, but each teacher hesitated when they learned specifically which classes I wanted to visit. Six teachers asked if I would like to observe the same subject but in different class period. The teachers explained that the class period in which I wanted to observe were "challenging," "rowdy," "out of control," or "interesting." I realized that I was asking to observe teachers at potentially vulnerable or overwhelming moments in their practice. (As I built relationships with the teacher participants and earned their trust, they all felt comfortable letting me visit any of their class periods.)

Institutional policies/practices made these classes more challenging for teachers and students. For example, tracking clustered the lowest achieving students together, and teachers reported that it was difficult to meet all of the students' learning and social/emotional needs. Moreover, the low-track classes were more crowded than the honors or Advanced Placement classes (because fewer students were recommended for advanced courses than 'regular' or low-track courses), which reduced the amount of time teachers could devote to individual learners. In low-track classes, the continuity of teaching and learning was interrupted as many students went to and returned from in-school suspension. This happened in part because young people of color, who were over-represented in low-track classes, experienced higher rates of suspension and expulsion than white students according to district reporting records. (Youth of color constituted on average 67% of the low-track classroom population in this study even though they were 56% of the school population.) Through institutional (and classroom) contextual interactions, raced, gendered, and classed ways of being a 'good' or 'bad' student/reader were negotiated between the predominantly white, middle-class teaching staff and the linguistically and culturally diverse student body.

As teachers and students interacted among these and other institutional contexts, the classrooms in which I observed were sometimes strained and hectic environments. At times, frustrated teachers and students made dismissive or uncaring statements. Instead of taking a reductionist or accusatory perspective of participants as I examine classroom contexts in this chapter, I complicate my analysis by considering the school institutional practices, norms, and policies that contributed to the creation of stressful classrooms. In

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the following chapter on institutional contexts, I further examine these systems-level mediators of literacy learning and struggling youth readers.

Organization and Presentation of Analysis

Students' perceptions and experiences significantly shaped my analysis, but as I present my analysis, I focus slightly more attention on teachers' perspectives and their construction of classroom contexts than students' perspectives. My discussion leans towards teachers (and administrators) because they had positional authority to influence the overall construction of contexts, and they therefore have the authority and responsibility to disrupt and reconfigure school processes and contexts through which struggling readers were constrained (e.g., skills-based intervention curricula, struggling reader identification processes). Importantly, young people demonstrated agency and acted with power even when they did not have authority to fundamentally manipulate some classroom or institutional circumstances, and I show how youths' enactments of power were key in shaping their literacy experiences and school contexts.

As I discussed in Chapter 3, when I turn to young people's perspectives, I foreground two cases, Keisha and Mark, in order to closely examine how the same youths moved across multiple contexts, how they reported their perspectives and experiences across contexts, and how contexts mediated their reading. During data collection, however, I devoted equal time to observing and interviewing all participants in order to identify sample-wide patterns. In this chapter, I report those patterns, but in a highly complex social environment, not every focal participant demonstrated every pattern. I use Keisha and Mark's cases as representative at a high level of the variability in reading skill that all focal participants demonstrated as they interacted among classroom contexts.

This chapter is organized by my main assertions instead of participant case studies. Thus I return to Keisha and Mark and their teachers as necessary in different assertions-based sections. To illustrate sample-wide patterns evident among youth, I also present data from the other focal participants and their teachers. In addition to moving across youths and teachers, I present data from multiple sources (e.g., interviews, observations, school records, assessments, district reports). To help organize long subsections, I use subheadings to indicate when I am presenting a case or exemplar for the purposes of close analysis and when I am drawing on data from multiple participants and sources in order to warrant claims about patterns in the data.

In summary, throughout Chapters 5 and 6, I present a complex discussion by moving across data that are individual, school-wide, and district-wide in scope in order to warrant complex claims about school contexts and struggling youth readers. By closely analyzing not only students' varying demonstrations of reading and learning, but also school personnel's interpretations of students as proficient and engaged (or struggling and unmotivated) readers—and the role school contexts played in demonstrations and interpretations of reading—I hope to point the way forward for positive changes in secondary schools.

Supports and Hindrances among Classroom Contexts: Keisha's Case Revisited

Returning to Keisha as a touchstone throughout my dissertation affords a complex analysis of school contexts and their role in literacy learning. For the purposes of this chapter, I return to Keisha to highlight her interactions with classroom contexts. As Keisha navigated different classroom spaces, her demonstration of productive reading-related skills, identities, and practices varied. Whereas in history and reading classes she

tended to opt out of instructional activities, avoid reading, and interact negatively with teachers, in math she tended to participate in activities, engage successfully with texts, and interact positively with others. Examining the contexts across these different classroom spaces—both how Keisha helped construct the contexts and how she was positioned among them—begins to explain why and how Keisha looked like a different kind of reader in different spaces and at different times. It also suggests how teachers can optimize contexts to support Keisha's literacy learning across content area classes.

A particularly supportive space for Keisha was her double-block math class— equally important is how Keisha contributed to the positive nature of the class. In math, Mr. Henry worked to build a respectful classroom community. He interacted positively with young people by encouraging their participation and praising their contributions. He also maintained consistently high academic and behavior expectations for all students. He fostered positive relationships in part by enacting rigorous, effective instruction that was both disciplinary in nature and appropriately scaffolded. Keisha described how they have a "fun time talking to each other and then we get right back to math." Getting "right back to math" appeared to be important to Keisha, and she reported that math was her "favorite class…because I can get my work done like a lot easier because Mr. Henry breaks it down…" As the productive social and instructional dimensions of the class reinforced each other, Keisha participated as a valued member of the community.

In contrast, Keisha's reading and history classes were spaces in which strained social interactions and behavior-focused instructional contexts appeared to hamper Keisha as a reader and learner. Whereas Mr. Henry reported that Keisha was improving, Ms. French, the reading teacher, and Mr. Robin, the history teacher, did not (or could not)

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identify any of Keisha's strengths. As I documented in Keisha's extended case study (See Chapter Four.), both teachers believed Keisha's learning and reading challenges stemmed from her poor choices and behavior. They experienced her—and positioned her—as a behavior problem. Thus, Keisha's student-teacher interactions in history and reading were more negative and less learning focused than they were in math class.

Although the goal of this chapter is to closely examine how classroom contexts such as Keisha's mediated students' reading, it bears noting the different institutional contexts that helped shape the three classes. History was a large, low-track class immediately following lunch, a time when ninth graders had an especially difficult time focusing on school according to three teachers I interviewed. Administrators assigned Mr. Robin to teach this history class (he did not volunteer), and he appeared frustrated and overwhelmed by the demands of the class. Algebra, on the other hand, was a small double-block class in which students had been vetted for having below grade-level math needs but not "behavior problems." Moreover, unlike Mr. Robin, Mr. Henry chose to teach the low-track class. Mr. Henry felt strongly about creating a meaningful math learning experience for students. Reading was also a small intervention class, but the teacher was held accountable for implementing a reading curriculum, Read 180, that Keisha did not value (see Chapter 4). By delimiting to some extent the instructional and social contexts that were possible in Keisha's classrooms (e.g., a district mandated and supervised reading curriculum), these institutional contexts mediated Keisha's reading.

Although this chapter focuses on classroom contexts, I trace the ways that institutional contexts enter in and intervene on classroom contexts. Drawing on data not only from Keisha and her teachers, but also from other youth and teacher participants, I

closely examine the interactions that focal participants had with social and instructional dimensions of classroom contexts and the extent to which those interactions bolstered or hindered focal participants' reading-related skills, practices, and identities.

Social Dimensions of Classroom Contexts

As young people read, wrote, and discussed texts, they interacted with others, and the social dimensions of classroom life were central in mediating youths' literacy learning. How youth helped to create social contexts and how they were positioned among them had consequences for their reading and learning. Particularly consequential for literacy were interactions that struggling youth readers had with teachers and the classroom climates that teachers and youth fostered. In the following sections, I draw on multiple data sources to examine how the tone of student-teacher interactions and classroom climates shaped focal participants' experiences as readers and equally important, how youths' literacy enactments shaped classroom social contexts.

Student-Teacher Interactions

Youth and teachers built and maintained relationships through interactions over time. I examined these interactions, the extent to which they seemed positive and facilitative of learning, and the meaning participants made through interactions in order to understand, among other things, the extent to which student-teacher relationships were trusting, caring, and respectful. I found that trusting and caring relationships, in combination with quality instruction, bolstered focal participants' literacy learning. Despite the boon that positive relationships appeared to be, however, analysis showed that focal participants tended to experience strained interactions with teachers more often than positive interactions. In this section I focus on the youth identified as struggling

readers and their interactions with teachers. In the subsequent section on classroom climate, I examine social interactions more broadly among all classroom participants.

Through interactions, teachers and students made meaning of youths' reading identities, practices, and skills. For example, through interactions, teachers made various interpretations of students' reading and learning proficiency/difficulty. When teachers understood learning difficulty as rooted in or related to behavior problems (e.g., 'talking back' to teachers, using cell phones, talking to peers at the wrong times), an association that teachers frequently made in the case of focal participants, teacher-student interactions mediated identity and behavior positioning of students in constraining ways. Teachers' interpretations of students' physiological states also mediated youth reading and learning in key ways. For instance, the way a teacher interpreted a student's distractedness when it was caused from a strained physiological state (e.g., being hungry or tired) was related to how teachers supported young people instructionally and socially/emotionally. When teachers made negative interpretations of young peoples' motivation, intention, or action, it was related to students' being positioned as "behavior problems" in the classroom.

Through student-teacher interactions, students also made interpretations about themselves as readers and learners and formed perceptions of teachers. Analysis showed that students and teachers recursively made sense of each other's perceptions as well as what counted as proficient or struggling learning. Analysis also showed, however, that teachers' interpretations were particularly powerful in establishing the extent to which ongoing student-teacher interactions were constructive or constraining for students' learning. For example in the case of Keisha, Ms. French believed Keisha's

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reading/learning difficulty stemmed from behavior problems, but Keisha believed her difficulty in class stemmed from frustration with an ineffective curriculum. Ms. French had more authority than Keisha to shape instruction, and so reading class became more about behavioral remediation than tailoring the reading program to meet Keisha's needs and interests. In this section I closely examine teachers' interpretations of students' reading/learning difficulty and physiological strain as well as how those interpretations were related to instruction and behavior positioning. I also I examine students' interpretations, responses, and resistance.

I present data to warrant these claims in the following subsections: (a) demonstrations and interpretations of students' reading/learning difficulty, (b) demonstrations and interpretations of students' physiological states, and (c) behavior problem positioning and resisting in the classroom.

Demonstrations and interpretations of students' reading/learning difficulty. Students demonstrated varying reading-related skills, identities, and practices, and those demonstrations were then interpreted in varying ways by the students, themselves, and by teachers. Youths' and teachers' interpretations informed each other, but analysis showed that teachers' interpretations were particularly important for shaping instruction and setting a tone for positive/negative interactions with students. For example, if a teacher interpreted a young person as demonstrating promising reading/learning skills, then student-teacher interactions tended to be positive and learning focused. However, if a teacher interpreted a student as generally low skilled particularly due to within-student deficits, then interactions tended to be strained and behaviorally focused. In addition, how teachers perceived students as readers and learners appeared related to how young

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people began to interpret or view themselves in classrooms. Because teachers had positional authority to interpret and position students in ways that shaped youths' opportunities to learn, I next closely examine teachers' interpretations of reading/learning difficulty, and I also consider the role of students' interpretations and resistance.

To understand how teachers interpreted and perceived students, I conducted interviews. I asked teachers to identify focal participants' reading/learning strengths and challenges. Each of the eight teacher participants were able to name challenges for the focal participants she/he taught, but four teachers did not or could not identify learning strengths. In other words, four teachers were able to speak only to students' challenges, and by focusing on weaknesses, these teachers failed to recognize the whole young person, which contributed to students' ongoing deficit positioning. For all teachers, even when they could identify strengths, teachers tended to speak in more detail about students' perceived difficulties. This suggests that teachers were more attuned to struggling readers' challenges than to their strengths. Because teachers' interpretations of these challenges helped shape both teachers' instruction and their perceptions of students as young people (e.g., behavior problem, hard worker, apathetic student), I focus here on reading/learning challenges. I recognize that my analytical focus could be viewed as deficit-oriented, but I argue that in order to disrupt the deficit positioning of struggling readers, this kind of examination is necessary. Specifically, if teachers are more focused on young people's learning and/or social/emotional needs than on students' strengths (as teachers in this sample tended to be), it is necessary to explicate teachers' interpretations and how those interpretations mediated student-teacher interactions, instructional decision making, and ultimately, young people's literacy learning opportunities.

After teachers identified a challenge that they perceived students to have, I asked why they believed students experienced that difficulty in classes. In total I coded responses from sixteen teacher interviews (two interviews with each of the eight teachers). Analysis showed that teachers articulated a wide array of explanations that ranged from locating students' source of difficulty in contextual factors outside of the student to problems within the student. Through coding, I identified seven categories of student-focused interpretations and six categories of context-focused interpretations (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1

Categories of Teachers' Interpretations of Students' Reading/Learning Difficulty

Student-Focused Interpretations	Context-Focused Interpretations
Behavior problems	Challenging out-of-school circumstances
Lack of reading/academic identity	Disadvantageous school/district structures
Low attendance	Instruction in current classes
Low motivation/poor attitude	Limitations of school physical space
Skill and/or knowledge gap	Poor previous schooling
Social/emotional issues	Social inequities
Strained physiological states	

An illustrative case: Ms. French's interpretations of Keisha and other youth.

Interpretations for reading/learning difficulty were not mutually exclusive. For example, Ms. French interpreted Keisha's reading problems as stemming from both behavior problems (i.e., aggression and acting out) and disadvantageous school/district structures (i.e., Keisha was scheduled into the same district-mandated reading intervention program from sixth through ninth grades, which Ms. French understood was frustrating and demotivating to Keisha).

However, even when teachers such as Ms. French made both student- and context-focused interpretations of a student's learning challenges, data triangulated from multiple sources (e.g., semi-structured and ethnographic interviews, observation field notes) showed that teachers tended to understand learning challenges in a consistent way and thus favor one perspective over the other. Ms. French, for instance, tended to attribute Keisha's low reading assessment scores and disengaged reading/learning identity to within-student factors having mainly to do with Keisha's motivation and behavior. In field notes from November 2012, I documented:

> Ms. French and I had lunch together today, and we talked about 3rd period Read 180. Keisha would not read during the silent reading rotation and refused to go on the computers for fluency and spelling practice. Instead Keisha was joking and laughing with Javon throughout much of class. Ms. French was extremely frustrated and said she does not think Keisha wants to be in 3rd period. Paraphrasing Ms. French: *Keisha's not getting anything out of this class, and she's distracting the other kids. I'm sorry but this class is not supposed to be for the "behavior kids."*

Ms. French linked Keisha's "not getting anything out of this class" to low motivation and behavior. (Teachers described students as "behavior kids" when teachers perceived youth as demonstrating consistently defiant behavior; these youth were scheduled into a reading class for "unengaged" students, which I discuss later in the chapter.)

Keisha would have agreed that she was "not getting anything out of the class," but she interpreted it as a problem of the curriculum being "boring" and unhelpful not a problem of her behavior. Indeed, Keisha's behavior (e.g., arguing with Ms. French,

refusing to read) was likely her way of resisting an intervention placement that felt was "unfair." Ms. French, however, interpreted Keisha's behavior not as resistance but as reason for reading difficulty.

Sometimes the same teacher adopted different perspectives for interpreting reading difficulty with different students. For example, although Ms. French interpreted Keisha's reading difficulty as mainly a within-student problem, Ms. French took a contextualized perspective when interpreting Calvin's reading struggle/proficiency. In a conversation with Ms. French in November, she explained that Calvin and many of her other Read 180 students had low motivation to read independently because the Read 180 books were uninteresting to them. Ms. French felt that the texts did not reflect the students or their lives well, so Ms. French brought in her own extensive collection of young adult literature including popular texts that featured young people of color and/or urban communities such as L. Divine's *Drama High* series. As a result, Calvin and other students (including Keisha) reported being more interested in independent reading and were more engaged when discussing their books. That Ms. French interpreted Keisha's reading reluctance (sometimes refusal) in less contextualized ways than she interpreted other students who were similarly reluctant and enacted similar reading-related identities is evidence of the variability in teachers' interpretations. As this example begins to illustrate, teachers made varying interpretations of students' reading-related skills, identities, and practices through interactions with individual students over time.

Teachers' interpretations of students' reading or learning difficulty—and the consequences of those interpretations—did not occur in a vacuum inside classroom walls. Rather, they were mediated by institutional contexts that helped constitute classroom

spaces. For example, even as Ms. French began to observe that Read 180 students were uninterested in the Read 180 classroom library, institutional contexts mediated Ms. French's decision to wait until late fall to introduce her own collection of young adult fiction. The school district literacy coordinators were conducting "fidelity checks" to ensure that teachers implemented Read 180 according to the program's stipulations, which included using the Read 180 library for the independent reading. Ms. French tried to comply with this mandate, and she initially attempted to support students' engagement with the Read 180 texts by using reading logs to support comprehension and doing book talks to pique interest. However, it became increasingly evident to Ms. French that some students' low engagement was more an issue of context (i.e., accessibility to interesting texts) than an issue of inherent disengagement or poor comprehension skills. Thus she eventually overlooked institutional policy and brought in her own books, which indeed appeared to bolster some students' engagement and increase their time spent reading. This exemplar illustrates not only how Ms. French participated in and resisted institutional contexts for literacy instruction, but also how her interpretation of low reading motivation shifted over time as she navigated institutional contexts. Moreover, it illustrates how institutional contexts constrained Ms. French's instruction and limited her freedom to draw on her professional judgment to introduce alternative texts earlier. Tracing institutional authority across district and classroom contexts shows how institutional contexts hindered a teacher's instruction and readers' engagement and learning.

This exemplar also illustrates how students resisted institutional contexts for prescriptive classroom libraries. Calvin and Keisha (along with their classmates) thought

Read 180 texts were uninteresting, and they resisted reading in blatant and indirect ways. For example, during observations of Keisha and Calvin's Read 180 class, I saw each of the class's nine students procrastinate during class transitions and spend a long time finding their books, getting settled, and beginning to read. Students hid their cell phones behind open books and texted while pretending to read. Students protested and complained that books were boring. Sometimes students simply refused to read. Although students did not have authority to opt out of the reading program or expand the classroom library, their acts of resistance encouraged Ms. French to disregard institutional policies for implementing Read 180. It took Ms. French's teacher authority (and resistance) to actually expand the classroom library, but through ongoing interactions, Ms. French and the students made recursive interpretations about the texts' role in students' demonstrations of low motivation and reading reluctance.

Patterns in teachers' interpretations of student difficulty. I looked across the teacher sample for patterns and variety in teachers' explanations of reading and learning difficulty. As teachers provided context-focused and student-focused interpretations of students' learning difficulty, teachers explained that learning challenges stemmed from many different sources. Analysis of teacher interviews showed that the following kinds of student-focused and context-focused interpretations (see Table 5.2 and Table 5.3).

Table 5.2

Kinds of Student-Focused Interpretations

Category	Kinds of Student-Focused Interpretations
Behavior problems	Lack of respect for teachers and fellow students hurts classroom culture
	Acting out behaviors
	Lack of attention during class; easily distracted
	Desire to disrupt class as often as possible
	Aggression
	Poor self-control
Lack of reading/academic identity	Lack of self-perception or identity as readers
	Lack of self-perception or identity as math learners
Low attendance	Decision not to attend school
	Purposely getting "kicked out" of classes
Low motivation/poor attitude	Decision not to engage
	Apathy
	Work avoidance
Skill and/or knowledge gap	Poor organization
	Poor reading fluency
	Poor comprehension skills
	Poor mathematical skills (e.g., basic operations, fractions)
	Difficulty with abstract concepts because cannot see connection to real world application
	Gaps in mathematical knowledge; math "deficiencies"
	Limited knowledge to understand historical texts
Social/emotional issues	Limited skills/awareness to repair relationships with teachers or students after conflict
	Low confidence as learners
	Over confidence as learners; do not recognize learning needs
	Poor social/emotional self-management
	Poor self-advocacy skills; not asking for help
Strained physiological states	Under influence of drugs or alcohol
	Hunger and food insecurity
	Worry about violence in or out of school
	Anxiety or tiredness from homelessness

Table 5.3

Kinds of Context-Focused Interpretations

Category	Kinds of Context-Focused Interpretations
Challenging out-of-school circumstances	Too many responsibilities at home (e.g., taking care of siblings)
	Limited family support at home
	Gang involvement
Disadvantageous school/district structures	Punitive behavior management policies; suspensions and expulsions remove students from class
	Racist behavior management approaches that target young men of color
	Variable enforcement of school-wide behavior policies
	De facto tracking; creates low-track classes in which teaching and learning are difficult
	Institutionalized tracking (i.e., honors, regular, remedial)
	Inequitable distribution of resources across district; school not receiving the financial and human resources it needs or deserves
	Time of day particular class is scheduled is not good for student
	Not enough instructional time; need block scheduling
	Too many years in same reading intervention program decreases motivation
	Socially acceptable to not be good at math
Instruction in current classes	Limited differentiated instruction
	Poor alignment between reading intervention and content classes
	Demands to think abstractly before developmentally ready
	Lack of co-teacher support because students do not qualify for special education services
	Lack of disciplinary context for learning skills; too much "drill and practice"
	Complex and/or long texts without appropriate supports
	Lack of independent reading time
Limitations of school physical space	Classrooms space limitations; not enough room to separate "behavior problem" students
	Poor conditions of classrooms and building (e.g., leaky ceilings, rats and mice, broken furniture) make learning difficult and communicate to students that they are not "worthy"
Poor previous schooling	Negative class norms from middle school (e.g., do not complete homework, do not expect to "work" in class)
	Movement from school to school and missed instruction
	Poor or limited early literacy opportunities
	Negative classroom community in which students did not feel safe to take learning risks
Social inequities	Poverty or lack of resources
	Classism and racism create inequitable school/social opportunities

As Table 5.2 and Table 5.3 show, eight teachers interpreted the reading/learning challenges of eight focal participants as stemming from many different sources, and their interpretations grouped into student-focused and context-focused perspectives. However, even though teachers' interpretations were diverse and varied from student to student (as in the case of Ms. French's student-focused interpretation of Keisha's challenges but context-focused interpretation of Calvin's challenges), teachers tended to demonstrate a dominant perspective as either student-focused or context-focused in their understanding of reading/learning difficulty across students. That is, teachers tended to discuss literacy learning struggles as pertaining mainly to students' skills, identities, and practices whereas other teachers tended to discuss learning struggle as manifesting when particular contextual dimensions did not leverage or support students' skills, identities, and practices. Notably, the context-focused teachers did not ignore student-specific issues, but they tended to understand these issues as existing in complex interaction with texts, activities, and contexts. Of eight teacher participants, three made predominantly context-focused interpretations of students' challenges, and five made predominantly student-focused interpretations. Notably, context-focused teachers tended to discuss students' challenges *and* strengths whereas student-focused teachers tended to discuss only challenges.

Examining teachers' actual comments about particular students affords a close analysis of the distinctions between student-focused and context-focused interpretations. Table 5.4 shows exemplars from teachers who tended to identify and interpret reading/learning challenges as more within-student problems, and Table 5.5 shows exemplars from teachers who tended to focus on context in their interpretations of

struggle. In both tables, the exemplars come from teachers' responses to interview questions about what they perceived to be focal participants' reading/learning challenges. During semi-structured interviews I asked impromptu follow-up questions to encourage teachers to elaborate, and teachers sometimes spoke in generalizations or discussed focal participants in association with other students identified as struggling readers/learners (e.g., "Children from poverty tend not to do as well."). In these instances, teachers tended to discuss patterns of behavior or learning difficulty that they identified in a focal participant along with other struggling readers.

Student-Focused interpretations of difficulty. Exemplars of student-focused interpretations not only placed the onus for reading/learning difficulty primarily on young people (rather than, for example, on the interaction among young people and instruction, texts, and contexts), but also seemed to blame students for purposely creating their reading/learning challenges (see Table 5.4).

Table 5.4

Exemplars of Student-Focused Interpretations of Reading/Learning Difficulty

Teacher	Subject	Focal Participant	Student-Focused Interpretations	Exemplar
Mr. Dunlap	Algebra	Evan (and other students)	Low attendance	*(It's) attendance. If students don't show up they're not going to learn algebra. That means they're setting themselves up for huge gaps in their learning. Those huge gaps lead to poor outcomes…*
Ms. French	Reading	Janice	Skill/knowledge gap; Low motivation/poor attitude	*She's got such an attitude sometimes…she's not writing very well…I mean, doesn't give two cents (about) a lot of stuff.*
Ms. Malloy	Algebra	Mark	Low motivation/poor attitude	*I think his biggest limitation is his attitude in the class. He does not want to be here. He is one of the most outspoken. "I hate this class. I hate you, Ms. Malloy."*
Mr. Robin	U.S. History	Keisha	Behavior problems	*I think a lot of it for her is also related to that behavior…it's you know that the ongoing struggle with her over her cell phone, it's just like - and I think …that is her way of disengaging plus her way of saying, 'he'll kick me out, then I don't have to be here.'*
Ms. Schmidt	Algebra	Mai See	Low motivation Skill/knowledge gap	*We did a group activity…but she never did anything, and she didn't ask for an explanation or help and she just sat there… She's got a lot of good intentions but it's just more of a challenge (with) the vocabulary.*

For example, Mr. Dunlap attributed Evan's reading/learning difficulty to low attendance, and he discussed Evan's and other struggling readers' attendance as an isolated choice absent contextual influences (e.g., extenuating circumstances outside of

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school that might make attending school difficult). From Mr. Dunlap's perspective then, choosing not to attend was a form of self-sabotage, "…they're setting themselves up for huge gaps in their learning." Similarly, Ms. Malloy explained that Mark's reading/learning limitations were primarily a problem of motivation and "attitude," and Ms. French attributed Janice's writing difficulty to Janice not caring ("doesn't give two cents").

Ms. Schmidt's account of Mai See was also student-focused, but it departed from the other exemplars in one notable way. Whereas other teachers did not mention anything redeeming or positive about the students when discussing their reading/learning difficulty, Ms. Schmidt regarded Mai See positively, "She's got a lot of good intentions." Mai See was an English Language Learner, and her conversational and academic English skills were the least developed in the participant sample. Teachers described her as "hard working," "really quiet," and "so cute." Their descriptions although not negative, could be framed as condescending and tending not to position Mai See as a leader or valuable contributor in classrooms. Like other focal participants, Mai See was still held responsible for her reading and learning difficulty. Ms. Schmidt said, "She didn't ask for an explanation or help and she just sat there." In addition to an issue of self-advocacy or motivation, Ms. Schmidt also explained that Mai See's limited vocabulary knowledge was an obstacle in her mathematical literacy.

The teachers interpreted all four students' struggles as problems the students could choose to rectify. In the case of Evan, Janice, and Mark, the teachers spoke of learning difficulty as largely student-created; in the case of Mai See, teachers tended to interpret at least some of her difficulty as attributable to limited English proficiency.

Across these exemplars, students' reading/learning struggles were interpreted as problems of behavior, attendance, or motivation instead of issues directly related to texts and disciplinary learning. As I demonstrate later in this chapter, when teachers understood students' difficulty in decontextualized ways, they tended to focus on behavior and skill remediation instead of meaning-focused instruction or support for positive learning identities. In later exemplars, I also show how students resisted decontextualized skill building and deficit positioning.

Context-Focused interpretations of difficulty. Instead of seeming to hold students' primarily responsible for their reading/learning difficulties, some teachers focused on how and why challenges manifested. (Relatedly, these teachers were able to speak to both students' learning strengths and challenges.) These teachers pointed to contextual factors and ways that students (and their families) interacted among school and other social contexts to understand reading/learning struggle. For example, Ms. Knox recounted working with Javier and a group of other struggling readers on research papers for English Language Arts (ELA). Ms. Knox explained to me that she discussed the assignment with the ELA teacher and told the ELA teacher that she would dedicate time to writing and revising the papers during reading class. Ms. Knox scaffolded Javier and his classmates by providing a writing organizer, extra writing instruction, ample class time, and repeated peer/teacher review. When the students' papers received Ds from the ELA teacher, Ms. Knox said that the students were "devastated." Ms. Knox did not attribute students' literacy difficulty (or the perception of difficulty) to skill gaps, poor writing practices, or underdeveloped identities as writers, but to limiting school contexts. She offered context-focused explanations such as less than effective instruction in the

ELA class, potentially unfair assessment, and ineffective collaboration between an ELA

teacher and a reading teacher. Over the year, Ms. Knox raised similar concerns about

other content areas classes, and her comments were less targeted at specific teachers'

practices than they were at how school instructional structures/curricula did not

effectively meet the needs of struggling readers. Table 5.5 shows examples of teachers'

contextualized interpretations of reading/learning difficulty.

Table 5.5

Exemplars of Context-Focused Interpretations of Reading/Learning Difficulty

Teacher	Subject	Focal Participant	Context-Focused Interpretations	Exemplar
Ms. Knox	Reading	Javier (and other students)	Instruction in current classes	*I was working with this group of kids on these big research papers for English…and they worked so hard on these projects…they were so proud and they turned them in and they all got D's.*
Mr. Henry	Algebra	Keisha	Challenging out-of-school circumstances	*She is, from what I understand, a member of a gang…she has a lot of social things that are competing against her being academic.*
Ms. Talbot	U.S. History	Aziza (and other students)	Social inequities	*I would say social inequality, mostly…Children from poverty tend to not do as well. Children of teen parents tend to not do as well. And, it really goes back to the birth to 3 and making sure that they're getting contact with vocabulary acquisition, with literacy, being read to.*
Ms. Talbot	U.S. History	Mai See	Instruction in current classes	*I just hope that one of the things that she would work on as she goes through her schooling would be to ask more questions and to get more help, and then I guess our job would be to find a way to teach her how to monitor her own comprehension.*

In another context-focused example, Ms. Talbot commented that the social inequality that resulted from inequitable early literacy experiences was one reason that students such as Aziza experienced reading/learning difficulty in school. Although this statement might reflect a deficit perspective about the literacy knowledge/practices of families experiencing poverty, Ms. Talbot actively fostered and built on all students'

strengths in her U.S. History class (which I demonstrate when I discuss instructional contexts later in this chapter). She conceptualized her teaching as a practice of social justice and regularly engaged students in socio-historical discussions about equity in students' immediate lived experiences and the broader world. Ms. Talbot interpreted students' literacy learning challenges as manifesting from an education debt some students experienced from sub-optimal literacy learning experiences over time. She recognized her and other teachers' responsibility to provide good instruction.

Like Ms. Schmidt, Ms. Talbot explained that Mai See needed to learn "to ask more questions and to get more help," but unlike Ms. Schmidt, Ms. Talbot recognized her role in teaching Mai See how to do that. Ms. Talbot said, "Our job would be to find a way to teach her how to monitor her own comprehension." Notably, Ms. Talbot did not attribute Mai See's lack of questions to low motivation or low self-advocacy but, instead, to under developed comprehension monitoring. This interpretation of reading difficulty as having to do with literacy knowledge and skills (rather than attitude) allowed Ms. Talbot to identify her instructional role in supporting Mai See. This exemplar illustrates how teachers made overlapping student-focused and context-focus interpretations of difficulty but tended to have a dominant way of understanding student's learning. Ms. Talbot's focus on context and literacy aligned to her instruction, which focused not on behavior and compliance, but on meaning-focused disciplinary literacy learning as she engaged students with primary source documents and the literacy practices/scaffolds to make meaning with them.

How teachers interpreted students' reading difficulty mattered for a host of reasons. It was related to how teachers regarded young people—ranging from self-

sabotaging struggling readers with behavior problems to capable learners with potential. It also was related to how young people regarded teachers. When teachers perceived youth as unmotivated "problems," youth perceived teachers negatively describing them, for example, as "dark" or "annoying." When teachers perceived youth as capable learners, youth tended to trust teachers and perceive them positively, for example as "good" or "cool." Teachers who located learning/reading challenges in contextual problems more than in student deficits tended to focus on instruction and positive relationship building more than behavior management and remediation. Students' sense of themselves as readers and learners was buoyed when teachers focused on instruction and positive relationships.

Demonstrations and interpretations of students' physiological states. Some focal participants attended school in the midst of traumatic or stressful experiences in their lives. During these times, young people often appeared consumed with their thoughts or feelings, and they had difficulty participating in the literacy learning and socializing of school. I am referring not to the daily ups and downs of attention span or energy level that many people experience in work/school settings, but rather to more extreme circumstances that seemed to surface periodically for some participants over the course of the year. For example, I documented focal participants experiencing homelessness, food insecurity/hunger, extreme tiredness, anxiety from threats of violence in or out the school, physical pain from untreated health issues, altered states from drug use, and marked distractedness from dilemmas in their families or social lives. Although these were not frequent experiences for youth participants, these exceptionally stressful times and the physiological effect they appeared to have on young people—and how

students' stressed states were interpreted by teachers—were significant in the mediation of young people's reading-related identities, skills, and practices.

Because youth identified as struggling readers were thought to have or be at risk for motivation and engagement problems (as evidenced by youth being sorted into "engaged" and "unengaged" reading classes by teachers and administrators), some teachers tended to interpret students' distressed or distracted states as deficits in motivation rather than cues of potentially serious life issues. Conversely, when teachers assumed context-focused perspectives of students' distress, teachers tended to search for root causes of stress and, consequently, provided cognitive, social, emotional, and physiological (i.e., food) resources for navigating challenging circumstances and reengaging with literacy learning.

An illustrative case: Evan and the effects of homelessness. For example, during February, one focal participant, Evan, began missing two to four days of school per week and demonstrating listless behavior. When at school, he appeared tired and unable to participate socially and/or instructionally. Evan's behavior was so markedly different from earlier in the year that many teachers noticed the change, and various teachers made different context-focused and student-focused interpretations of Evan's stressed state (see Figure 5.1). Ms. Knox, the reading teacher, suspected homelessness and food insecurity to be the cause; she approached the school social worker to investigate the matter and also initiated a Student Resource Team meeting to discuss possible supports for Evan. Mr. Dunlap, Evan's math teacher, interpreted Evan's low attendance and distractedness as low motivation. In an interview, Mr. Dunlap said

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(Evan) fell into attendance as an issue and then he fell into the apathetic (issue) as well…and the only thing we could do is…make it seem inviting when he was here because we want him to be choosing the classroom over choosing the street…he's starting to taper off and we've got to stay on top of him on that. But I am also a believer in natural consequence as well because, like I said, we foster the opportunity and the student has to make the choice to want it…but unfortunately if we can't get him to make the right choice, if we can't get him to buy into what we're selling him, he's going to have to feel the natural consequence to hopefully learn from his mistakes.

In addition Mr. Dunlap to attributing learning difficulty to Evan's choice not to attend school, which I discussed earlier in the chapter, this statement further demonstrates that Mr. Dunlap understood attendance as a matter of choice and attitude. Construing chronic absenteeism as "choosing the street" instead of considering what life circumstances may be contributing to a 14-year-old boy's difficulty attending school illustrates the extent to which Mr. Dunlap interpreted Evan's physiological and learning issues as within-student problems. In observations, when Evan attended algebra class, Mr. Dunlap tended to either not address Evan during instruction or ask Evan where his homework was.

Ms. Knox and Mr. Dunlap's different interpretations led to different outcomes. Ms. Knox had built a trusting relationship with Evan over the year, and she asked Evan what was preventing him from coming to school and why he seemed tired and unfocused in class. Initially, Evan responded vaguely, "Some stuff is going on at home." Ms. Knox started offering Evan snacks as he entered her class, which he readily accepted. When he ate and his blood sugar rebounded, he was much more engaged in reading, discussing

texts, and interacting with others. Eventually, Ms. Knox learned that Evan was experiencing homelessness and not eating enough. His "food number" for free and reduced price lunch had stopped working in the cafeteria. Ms. Knox's context-focused interpretations and subsequent actions led to Evan's food plan being reactivated. Evan's attendance and alertness eventually improved, and his relationship with Ms. Knox became even more trusting than it had been. He engaged in literacy learning and earned credit in his reading class. Evan thought of himself as "good" at reading. Conversely, Mr. Dunlap continued to describe Evan as "apathetic," and even though Evan was more energetic in school, Evan remained disengaged in algebra class and failed to earn credit.

Moreover, Evan interpreted himself as poor at mathematics; he said, math is "not my best subject…It's kind of more difficult sometimes." Through interactions, the teachers and Evan made interpretations about who he was as a learner, reader, and young person. When a teacher interpreted Evan in constraining ways, Evan resisted by not attending class regularly, but Evan also appeared to adopt the teachers' poor perception of him. On the other hand, when a teacher made positive assumptions about Evan and sought to support him in multidimensional ways, Evan's literacy learning, physiological wellbeing, self-perception thrived.

Figure 5.1. Differing Interpretations of Evan's Listlessness and Low Attendance
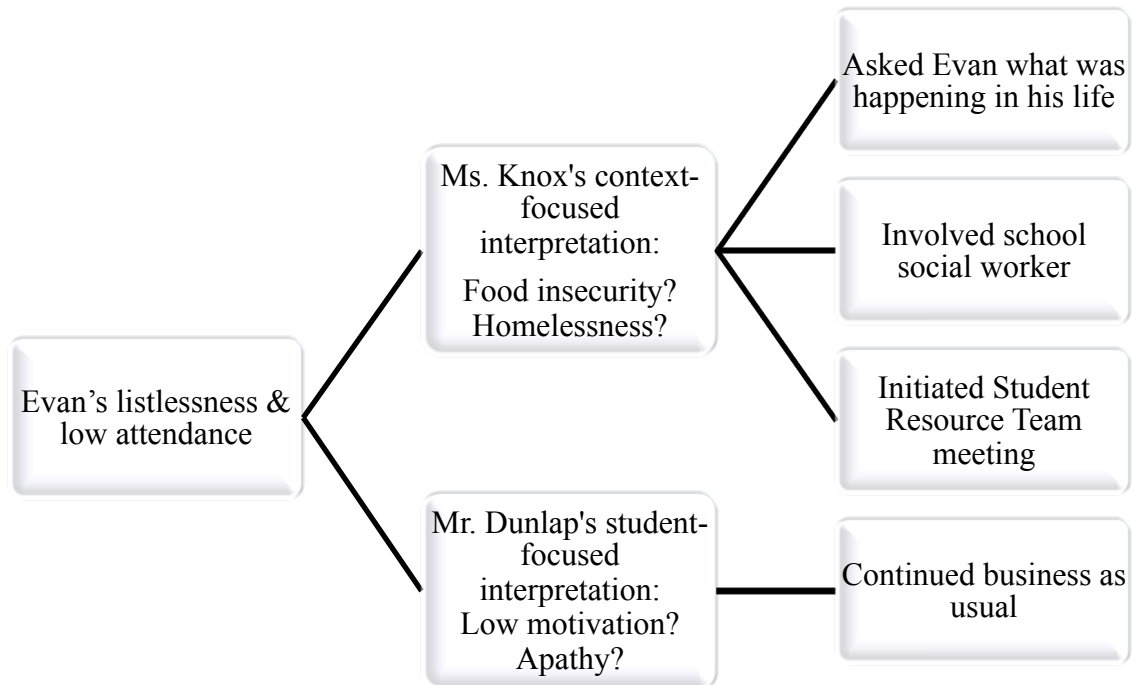
Institutional contexts mediated the teachers' interpretations of Evan and the interactions between Evan and teachers. Evan's algebra class was a large, low-track class in which youth identified as struggling readers and students with special education services were clustered. Even with a special education co-teacher, Mr. Dunlap reported that it was difficult to know all the students' math learning and social/emotional needs. Ms. Knox, on the other hand, had only eight students in Evan's reading class, and she had more time to engage young people in conversations about their learning and their lives. The teachers' interpretations of Evan, mediated to some extent by these kinds of institutional contexts, were quite different, and appeared to lead to different learning and social outcomes in each class.

An illustrative case: Janice and the effects of physical pain. In another example illustrating teachers' and students' interpretations of stressed physiological states, Janice, a focal participant, refused to participate in a writing activity during Ms. French's reading class in January. Even though Janice reported enjoying reading and had read two novels during the fall, she did not enjoy reading class and had a history of arguing with Ms. French and other students. On at least two occasions, Ms. French had sent Janice to in-school suspension with a school security escort. Indeed, Janice had a reputation as a "behavior problem" in her reading class and other classes. In an interview with me, Janice reported having a "temper problem" and described techniques she had learned from a social worker for calming down. On this particular day when Janice would not write, Ms. French became irritated, and they engaged in a tense interaction. Janice repeatedly said, "I can't! I can't!" Ms. French eventually left Janice alone to sit at her desk. I noticed that Janice had been saying, "I can't!" instead of "I won't." or "I don't want to," and she seemed more agitated than usual. I approached Janice to ask what she meant by "I can't!", why she seemed upset on this particular day, and what might help her be able to write. (Janice and I had built a trusting relationship over the course of the year, and we regularly discussed her reading/writing and school experiences.)

When I asked Janice why she could not write, she showed me one of her fingers. It had an infected bump the size of a small grape right where a pen would press if she were to write anything. She explained that she had accidentally cut herself, and her family did not have health insurance to go to a doctor. Her father had eventually taken her to an urgent care center, and she was being treated for a serious infection. Janice was angry that Ms. French did not care about her injury, but I knew that Ms. French did not

realize Janice was injured and could not hold a pen or pencil. Ms. French interpreted Janice's statements as obstinate refusals to engage in literacy learning perhaps because of their history of difficult interactions. Instead of asking follow-up questions to learn more or come up with a solution (e.g., perhaps Janice could have typed on a computer), Ms. French raised her voice and insisted that Janice participate. In this instance, a young person's limitations caused by physical pain were interpreted at best as low motivation and at worst as insubordination. In turn, Janice perceived Ms. French as deliberately uncaring; when Ms. French walked out of earshot, Janice quietly called her a "bitch." This incident further strained Ms. French and Janice's relationship and their ability to focus on literacy learning.

Patterns in teachers' interpretations of physiological stress. These examples illustrate the ways that focal participants' stressed physiological states were sometimes interpreted as issues of motivation or work avoidance. Similar to Janice and Evan, other focal participants experienced stressful events that made concentrating on school extremely difficult. In one instance, Calvin came to school with a fractured foot. Calvin was also threatened by another student and brought a knife to school for self-protection (for which he was expelled). Keisha was threatened by another student and was preparing for and worrying about a fight on at least one occasion. Mark and his family struggled during the anniversary of his brother's death, and Mark began to come to class high, which happened multiple times per week for a month. Aziza dealt with depression, and she wrote a poem in the first-person that showed suicidal thoughts. (Aziza's reading teacher referred her to a school counselor, which resulted in one meeting between Aziza and the counselor instead of ongoing support.) At times Aziza socially isolated herself

and could not (or would not) participate in class activities. In the face of these and other circumstances, focal participants sometimes demonstrated resilience and fortitude, but at other times, they were overwhelmed and unavailable emotionally, cognitively, and socially for school learning. Perhaps because struggling readers were frequently positioned as under-motivated and/or as behavior problems, some teachers read students' strained demeanors as obstinacy. Subsequently, stressful life circumstances such as limited access to health care and unstable housing appeared to exacerbate students' deficit positioning in school. In this way, poverty—and the effects of limited resources— played roles in positioning struggling youth readers. Moreover, youths' reading and content area curriculum did little to help young people cope with life stressors. Skills-based teaching and low-interest texts, for example, held little meaning for students, which in combination with challenging life circumstances contributed to students' low motivation and deficit positioning. Conversely, when teachers made context-focused interpretations of students' stress and enacted meaning-focused scaffolded instruction, teachers and students engaged in positive interactions. In these instances, teachers provided additional support/understanding, which led to improved learning experiences.

Behavior problem positioning and resisting in the classroom. When teachers made student-focused interpretations of young people's learning/reading difficulty or their stressed physiological states, these interpretations tended to lead to a focus on students' behaviors and the extent to which students' complied with classroom rules. In this way struggling youth readers tended to be positioned as "behavior problems" across classroom and institutional contexts. Students resisted positioning in a host of ways— withdrawing, acting-out, forming alliances with peers, or skipping class. Mark's and

Keisha's experiences were representative of the times when focal participants were positioned as behavior problems. A close examination of their cases illustrates how youth participated in and resisted being positioned as 'behavior problems' among various school contexts. After I discuss their cases, I show patterns in behavior positioning across the sample and discuss specific instances involving Janice, Calvin, and Evan.

An illustrative case: Mark and behavior problem positioning across contexts.

To understand how Mark was positioned as a behavior problem requires examining the institutional contexts, specifically tracking and scheduling practices, that informed his classroom spaces. Mark's ninth grade schedule included both de facto low-track classes and officially tracked classes (i.e., reading class, "regular" content area classes). Mark's U.S. History and Algebra teachers described the class periods in which Mark was scheduled as having students who were, on average, lower skilled, less academically confident, and more likely to have "behavior problems" than students in other periods. The Algebra teacher, Ms. Malloy, described Mark's math class as the "single worst class…in my sixteen years of teaching." The extent to which the teachers' perceptions were accurate or fair, why and how their perceptions were formed, and the consequences that those perceptions had for students' learning are important questions, but equally important are ways that those perceptions shaped their interactions with the students in the classes. That both teachers reported Mark's class periods as being their "toughest" suggests that Mark was clustered into a particular track. Mark's interaction among tracked classes mediated the extent to which he developed and/or was viewed as having reading/learning and behavior problems.

Mark's teachers experienced their classes as challenging, and so did Mark. In an interview, Mark identified what he perceived to be some of the challenges in U.S. History and suggested that to improve the class, the teacher, Mr. Robin, could

> …try to keep (the reading) in our mid-range of reading instead of how he thinks that we'll be able to read…try to let us do the work instead of sitting and watching him do it for us most of the time because that's mostly what the problem is….He's doing the work for us and he could teach us how to do it and then we could get like in groups or partners…we'll be able to talk and we'll do the work.

Field observations corroborated Mark's account. Mr. Robin tended to lecture, dominate class discussions, and assign highly complex texts (e.g., primary sources) with little scaffolding (I provide an example of Mr. Robin's teaching in the Instructional Dimensions section of this chapter). Contrary to some notions that struggling readers/students are unmotivated or work avoidant, Mark expressed an agentic desire to do more work, take charge of his learning, collaborate with peers, and read accessible history texts. According to Mark, students "completely go off task because we feel what we're doing is just completely meaningless." Mark experienced the instructional context of the class as one that limited students' learning and thus resulted in off-task behavior.

Whereas Mark attributed off-task behavior to lack of meaningful learning opportunities, Mr. Robin attributed it to student "ringleaders" who chose to instigate disruption in order to avoid work. Mr. Robin viewed Mark as

> one of those kids in that class…who are not necessarily ringleaders, but who are kids who are perfectly willing to let things spiral out of control and help it spiral so they don't have to do stuff.

In history class, Mark was constructed as having not only reading difficulty, but also behavior problems. Similarly, the math teacher, Ms. Malloy said that at times Mark could be disengaged and obstinate with an "I'm-not-going-to-do-this-because-you-might-want-me-to sort of attitude." Field observations failed to support these accounts. In 21 history class observations and nine math class observations, Mark demonstrated engaged behaviors (e.g., reading aloud and silently, volunteering to answer a question, taking notes) and disengaged behaviors (e.g., head down on his desk, laughing at another student's joke, having a "side conversation"), but I never observed him involved in highly disruptive or defiant behavior that helped classes "spiral out of control."

Perhaps so intertwined were perceptions of behavior problems and learning problems that when asked what would most help Mark's reading and learning in history class, Mr. Robin said "behavior expectations of, you know, you need to be in your seat, you need to not be engaged in a side conversation." When asked what would help Mark's math learning, Ms. Malloy said possibly "a different teacher…a different time of day…another year of maturity." These recommendations may have proved helpful for Mark's learning. However, it is striking that neither teacher mentioned instruction as a way to bolster Mark's content area and literacy learning. This focus on "maturity" and behavior remediation over instruction illustrates the extent to which Mark had come to be viewed as a behavior problem as much as, or perhaps even more than, he was viewed as a student or a reader.

An illustrative case: Keisha and varying behavior positioning across contexts. Similar to Mark's experience, Keisha was regarded as a behavior problem by multiple teachers and the ninth grade administrator. Comparing how three teachers handled

Keisha's cell phone use, which violated the school-wide no electronics rule, illustrates the varying ways Keisha was positioned during classroom interactions. Keisha's history and reading teachers, Mr. Robin and Ms. French, discussed her reading/learning challenges as stemming from defiant behavior, and in those classes, teachers focused on, and sometimes provoked, 'acting-out' behaviors. Conversely, Keisha's math teacher, Mr. Henry, focused on Keisha's positive learning and classroom contributions. As discussed in Keisha's case study in Chapter Four, Ms. French reprimanded Keisha for using her cell phone even while other students used their phones. After being singled out, Keisha was angry and refused to participate in reading class activities. In U.S. History, Mr. Robin said that the " ongoing struggle with her over her cell phone, it's just like...her way of disengaging plus her way of saying, 'he'll kick me out, then I don't have to be here.'" I observed Mr. Robin send Keisha to in-school suspension three times because she used her cell phone and then would not give it to Mr. Robin, which was the classroom policy.

Whereas cell phone use resulted in Keisha being reprimanded or sent out of other classes, Mr. Henry and Keisha were able to calmly navigate similar instances in math class in part because Keisha was not positioned as a behavior problem. Mr. Henry reported, "I don't come in and out (about the cell phone)…there are rules, and I always try to be as calm as I can, "Keisha, you gotta put that phone away…" and then like a little bit later, if it's still out…"you gotta give it to me." She always does and she's always fine…" Mr. Henry not only maintained consistent behavior expectations for all students, he also communicated those expectations calmly and respectfully. He said, Keisha always " knows how I'm going to treat her." He and Keisha built a trusting relationship through respectful, consistent interactions, and Keisha interacted among those classroom

contexts not as a "behavior problem," but as an improving mathematics learner and a clever, engaged class participant.

Notably, Keisha's cell phone came up in three separate interviews with three different teachers. Despite the fact that blatant and clandestine cell phone use was commonplace among students at Moore High, Keisha's history and reading teachers regarded her in particularly negative ways for violating the cell phone rule. That Keisha continues to use her phone throughout the year (particularly in history and reading after it causes arguments with teachers and suspension) may have been one way of communicating that constraining instruction and negative positioning was not worth her time and attention. It could also have been a way that Keisha avoided difficult or boring learning activities. From this perspective, Keisha's ongoing phone texts, calls, and internet searches were demonstrations of agency. At the same time, however, teachers' authority to confiscate the phone or reprimand Keisha more often than other students reflects the institutional arrangements that positioned Keisha in less authoritative ways than teachers. When instruction and relationships were productive, as in math class, Keisha showed agency by participating in math learning more often than checking her phone.

Patterns in behavior positioning. Keisha's and Mark's classroom experiences, through which they tended to be positioned as behavior problems more than valued learners, were representative of the sample. The following exemplars show patterns in teachers' behavior positioning: Ms. French described Janice in the following way.

She's got such an attitude sometimes…it's kind of an edginess…she can be terrible in class at times, terrible. You can just tell the whole class is kind of cringing.

Across ninth grade teachers, Janice was known as a behavior problem, but Janice positioned herself differently during an interview with me. She said,

Remember when (Ms. French and I) got into something and I just started screaming. The only reason that happens is because I do have anger issues and it's hard for me to control them…(but in history) class, I just don't seem to get mad, because (Ms. Talbot) doesn't make me mad. But (she) makes it so I'm like, "What is this?", questioning about what we're learning. (Ms. Talbot) makes sure I get all the details.

Whereas Ms. French understood Janice's "screaming" as bad behavior and called security, Janice understood her behavior as stemming from anger. Moreover, although she recognized her anger was an "issue" and hard to "control," she implied that her anger resulted from poor instruction. Unlike in reading class with Ms. French, Janice explained that in history class Ms. Talbot "doesn't make me mad" because Ms. Talbot helped her focus on the learning ("(she) makes it so I'm…questioning about what we're learning…she makes sure I get all the details"). Janice's statement implies that she understands her behavior not as a problem of compliance or "edginess," but rather as a response to the problem of poor instruction.

Evan was also positioned as a behavior problem. Mr. Dunlap said, "I imagine (Evan's) the type of kid you don't cross but I've never had that situation to see what would happen…and I wouldn't want to see that." Later in that same interview, Mr.

Dunlap said that Evan needed to choose between the "street" and school. Similarly, Mr. Robin described Calvin as pulled between school and social identification:

> Calvin is I think straddling two worlds…his male peer friends are screwing around…I think he has possible gang tie issues…I don't think he's engaged in what is going on in class…so it's like he is a classic example of a kid who I think could go and do well probably in a setting that maybe doesn't require him to posture.

The teachers believed Calvin and Evan were involved in potentially dangerous behavior, which was related to how the teachers interpreted and positioned the boys in class. Mr. Robin interpreted Calvin as posturing to earn credibility with gang-involved friends who were supposedly not interested in learning. Mr. Dunlap reported not wanting to "cross" Evan, and he tended not to engage with Evan in class. In classroom observations, I observed the teachers position boys as behavior problems.

In addition to observations of all youth, analysis of school records showed a pattern in which struggling readers tended to be positioned as behavior problems across their classrooms. For instance, six of the eight focal participants received official behavior referrals for a total of 42 referrals, the most common of which was for "insubordination" during class. That the school's behavior policy explicitly called for students' subordination to teachers underscores the extent to which institutional contexts positioned teachers as authoritative and students as compliant. And, that these behavior referrals became a permanent part of students' high school records is evidence of how institutional labeling or positioning spanned across school years and spaces.

Further problematic, behavior referrals resulted in missed instruction. Focal participants missed on average 14.9 days of school due to out-of-school suspension or expulsion, which reduced their opportunities to engage in text-based learning and school social life. The school did not track the number of times students were asked to leave class or sent to in-school suspension, and during my time in the school, I frequently encountered struggling readers sitting in the hall or walking down to the school office after being asked to leave class. If Moore High counted the number of in-school suspensions in addition to out-of school suspensions, the amount of instruction struggling readers missed would have been substantially higher. Nevertheless, analysis of available school records, interviews, and observation field notes showed that "struggling reader" and "behavior problem" labels were often conflated in classroom spaces. As I showed earlier in this chapter, teachers and students spoke about reading/learning problems and behavior problems as intertwined issues.

Without positive and trusting relationships with teachers, struggling readers tended to be positioned as "behaviors" and enact behavior problems. Behavior positioning was related to strained interactions with teachers and missed instruction due to suspension and/or students reluctance to participate in classroom learning. When teachers teased a part learning challenges and behavior issues and treated students respectfully, students participated as not only motivated learners and readers, but also valued members of classroom communities.

Classroom Climate

In addition to student-teacher interactions, the tone of classroom climates was also an important mediator of focal participants' reading. Students' classroom communities

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ranged from positive and safe environments to negative and risky environments for social growth and academic learning. These classroom climates, constructed particularly through classroom discourse and signs/posters displayed on walls, mediated identity and behavior positioning of struggling youth readers. Positive and safe environments appeared to support focal participants' reading skills, identities, and practices. I present data to warrant these claims in the following subsections: (a) classroom discourse and (b) classroom visual images.

Classroom discourse. Because teachers reported that "behavior problems" were common across low-track classrooms, how teachers negotiated what they perceived as off-task behavior was particularly important in setting the tone for classroom discourse. As I discussed earlier in the chapter, when teachers focused on behavior problems more than on learning (which tended to occur when teachers interpreted learning difficulty as a within-student problem), teachers emphasized behavior management over knowledge building and literacy learning. With an emphasis on behavior and compliance, student-teacher interactions were strained, and classroom discourse was negatively oriented.

As one indicator of the extent to which classroom discourse was positive or negative, I counted the number of redirections or call-outs and the number of praises or compliments that each teacher participant directed toward individual students (not only focal participants) during whole-class instruction in one class period in April 2013 (see table 5.6). These class periods were representative of teachers' typical classes. I found that teachers with context-dependent views of learning difficulty (e.g., Ms. Talbot and Mr. Henry) tended to compliment and praise students more often than they redirected or disciplined students. An example of a praising statement was Ms. Talbot's comment,

"Great, that's really insightful, Janice!" Teachers with more deficit-oriented views of learning difficulty (e.g., Mr. Robin and Ms. Malloy) tended to make more behavior-focused critiques than praising statements during instruction. For example, Ms. Malloy interrupted her math instruction to say, "Enough! Stop it."

Table 5.6

Teacher Call-Outs and Compliments in One Class Period

Teacher	Subject	Call-outs	Compliments	Interpretations of Reading/Learning Difficulty
French	Reading	1	1	student-focused
Knox	Reading	11	15	context-focused
Robin	U.S. History	12	2	student-focused
Talbot	U.S. History	4	10	context-focused
Henry	Algebra	5	8	context-focused
Schmidt	Algebra	0	0	student-focused
Malloy	Algebra	27	5	student-focused
Dunlap	Algebra	4	3	student-focused

When teachers issued more critiques than praising comments, it disrupted the flow of teaching and learning and drew attention to off-task behaviors. This was the case in Ms. Malloy's class period in which she publicly disciplined students 27 times and complimented or acknowledged students' mathematical contributions five times. Over time, this predominance of teacher call-outs contributed to a tense and disjointed discourse in Ms. Malloy's class. Mark described the class as "dark." He explained,

> We'll sit there quiet and we'll pay attention and that's what she wants. But then, if
> we ask a question, then she'll answer and then when people start to comment,
> she'll get mad. But we comment to help the person learn.

Observations corroborated Mark's account. Ms. Malloy became visibly frustrated during every class session I observed, and she reprimanded students with statements such as "I've had enough" and "Stop it! We're not doing this today." Mark explained that to make the class "brighter," Ms. Malloy could "give us more compliments." In addition to counting teachers' statements during one class period, analysis of observation data showed that Mark and other struggling readers tended experience negative classroom discourses in which teachers repeatedly and publicly disciplined students. Data exemplars from earlier in the chapter document these negative student-teacher interactions. The following list refers to these exemplars, and in parentheses I indicate the other focal participants who were also in those classes experiencing negative student-teacher interactions: Evan (with Calvin) in Mr. Dunlap's class; Janice (with Mai See and Aziza) in Ms. French's class; Keisha (with Mark and Calvin) in Ms. French's class; Keisha and Mark (with Evan and Calvin) in Mr. Robin's class; and Mark in Ms. Malloy's class.

When teachers issued compliments (e.g., pointed out students' insights and positive contributions) more often than critiques, classroom climates were constructive, positive, and in Mark's words, "brighter." Praising comments directed attention to students' learning and thinking, and so they supported the flow of instruction. Table 5.6 shows that three of eight teachers, Mr. Henry, Ms. Knox, and Ms. Talbot, praised students' thinking more often than they reprimanded students' behavior, and across interviews and observations, these three teachers tended to make contextualized interpretations of students' reading and learning challenges. Correspondingly, Mr. Henry, Ms. Knox, and Ms. Talbot fostered positive, constructive climates, and struggling readers reported enjoying these classes. In interviews, Javier and Keisha reported that Mr.

Henry's class was their favorite; Aziza reported that Ms. Knox's class was her favorite; and Evan reported that Ms. Knox's class was his favorite. Youth did not report that any of the other five teachers' classes were among their favorite courses.

In some classes, teachers made few to no comments praising or reprimanding students. In Ms. Schmidt's class, for example, over the course of one period she led a homework review, taught a whole group lesson, and sent students to work in small groups without issuing a compliment or redirecting a student. Several factors may have been to the limited number of student-teacher interactions. First, Ms. Schmidt's instruction was predominately teacher-directed, and there were few opportunities for young people to participate. Thus, there was little for Ms. Schmidt to praise. It was her second year of teaching, and in observations it appeared that she worked hard to 'cover the content' and keep activities running smoothly. Her efforts to control the class and 'deliver' adequate instruction seemed to limit students' participation. In addition, Ms. Schmidt explained that because it was first hour, students tended to be tired and quiet.

Unlike Ms. Malloy's class that was tense and disjointed, Ms. Schmidt's class was passive. Although Ms. Schmidt did not criticize students or disrupt her instruction with excessive reprimands, she also did little to solicit students' questions or facilitate mathematical discussion. Her limited inclination (or limited pedagogical skill) to actively involve students may have been related to student-focused interpretations of learning difficulty. As I previously discussed, Ms. Schmidt interpreted Mai See as not doing "anything," and she viewed it as Mai See's responsibility to "ask for an explanation" instead of "just" sit there. In the context of the class, however, Mai See had few opportunities to seek help or articulate confusion. Although Ms. Schmidt did not have

strained or negative interactions with young people, the class appeared stalled. Ms. Schmidt did not fully recognized the opportunities (and responsibilities) she had as a teacher to work with student to build constructive contexts for learning.

In positive classroom climates, students were active learners. Moreover, both student-teacher interactions and student-student interactions tended to be positive, trusting, respectful, and learning-focused. As focal participants helped construct these contexts for learning, as Keisha and Javier did in Mr. Henry's class, youth demonstrated motivated and improving/proficient literacy practices and skills (e.g., referencing texts to complete assignments, participating in text-based discussions). Of course because contexts are fluid and multiple, classroom climates shifted from day to day. Despite the positive nature of Mr. Henry's class, not everyday was a good day for everyone in algebra. Students came to class in bad moods. One day, Mr. Henry came to school and explained that he was sleep deprived and "grouchy" from being up all night with his child. However, even when the students and, less commonly, Mr. Henry, were ill-tempered, the ongoing constructive climate of the class and actors' positive histories of participation appeared to buffer difficult moments. As a group, the students and teacher returned to trusting and positive ways of interacting after turbulent times.

Classroom visual images. Visual images (i.e., signs, posters) were also related to classroom climates. In low-track classrooms, signs and posters tended to communicate negative messages about students' motivation and orientation to school. The following poster is typical of those displayed in intervention classrooms.

Figure 5.2. Obama Classroom Poster
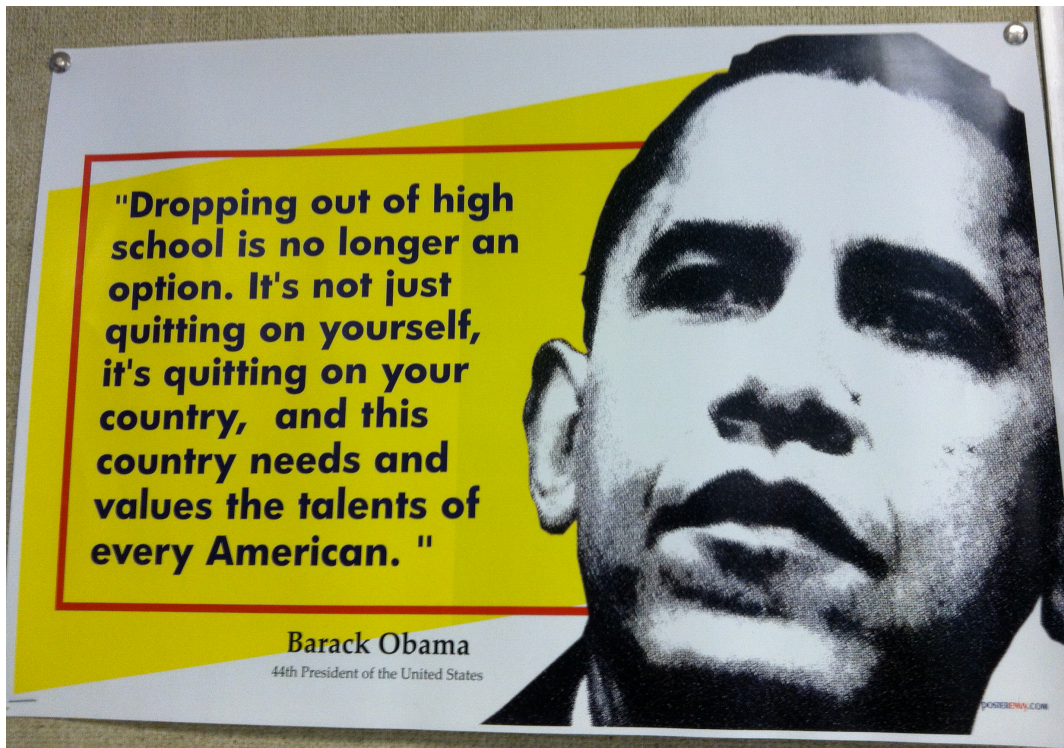
From one perspective, the poster could be read as encouraging academic success, but it presupposes the reader's inclination to drop out and/or not do well in school. The poster ultimately positions the reader/student as potentially "quitting on" herself. Furthermore, the fact that the poster's quote is attributed to the President of the United States imbues the message with federal institutional authority. Moreover, many students and families in the community admired President Obama (in the school's voting district, Obama won 71% of the vote in the 2012 election). Students of color (who were over-represented in low-track classes) expressed pride that Obama was the first African American president, which may have leant credibility to the poster's message. The poster was displayed in a reading intervention class and is representative of the negativity of

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other low-track classroom signs (e.g., "WARNING, deadlines are closer than they appear!"). These visual displays provided a 'silent' backdrop for classroom interactions and an ongoing reminder to focal participants that they were poised for school difficulty. Notably, Ms. Talbot, Ms. Knox, and Mr. Henry—three teachers who tended to take contextualized views of reading/learning difficulty and make more praising statements than critical statements during whole-class discussion—did not display negative posters. Instead, their classroom walls showcased student work, content area texts, and other information. Examples include a poster of the Pythagorean Theorem in Mr. Henry's room, LGBTQ Safe Zone sticker on Ms. Talbot's door, and student-made charts of metaphors and similes in Ms. Knox's room.

Because teachers decided what hung on their classroom walls, they had more authority than students to visually contextualize the learning space. In large part, teachers controlled what messages the classroom walls communicated. Even if teachers asked students to help decorate or create signs, teachers ultimately held authority to determine what signs, posters, and images were appropriate. Students could deface or tear down classroom posters, but those actions co-constructed the context by positioning students as "behavior problems."

Thus not only were focal participants' interactions with teachers important in mediating students' reading, but also the overall classroom climate in which interactions occurred bolstered or constrained literacy learning. Supportive classroom climates were marked by a predominance of praising teacher statements during whole group instruction, positive exchanges among students and between students and the teacher, a focus on learning instead of behavior management, and visual displays of student work and

content area texts. In these environments, focal participants tended to be positioned as productive contributors to classroom learning and social life and, equally important, their contributions helped construct positive climates.

In summary, the social dimensions of classroom contexts that were important mediators of focal participants' reading included student-teacher interactions and classroom climates. Among positive student-teacher interactions and positive classroom climates, focal participants tended to demonstrate improving, if not proficient, reading skills and practices and productive reader/learner identities.

Instructional Dimensions of Classroom Contexts

Positive social dimensions of classroom contexts were fundamentally intertwined with and supported by effective instruction. In fact, focal participants reported liking particular teachers because they taught well—not because teachers were 'nice' or 'friendly.' Rather, by maintaining high standards, by believing that struggling youth readers could engage in complex thinking, reasoning, reading and writing, and by teaching effectively, teachers engendered trust and respect among focal participants. For example, Javier told me that Mr. Henry was "really cool…because we won't always like follow what you're supposed to do, like what the book and stuff teaches…he shows us little (math) tricks that he does and that's making me feel good." Instead of following a conventional algebra textbook or plodding through what "you're supposed to do" in a math class, Mr. Henry showed students ways to understand and engage with algebra, and this made Javier not only like Mr. Henry but also feel good about himself as a learner. Notably, Javier referred to the instructional moves as "tricks," which may suggest that Mr. Henry taught superficial 'shortcuts' for solving problems, but I observed that Mr.

Henry consistently situated his instruction in substantive mathematical concepts. I believe that Javier called the instruction "tricks" because math had previously been mysterious and difficult, and because Mr. Henry's teaching was not "what you're supposed to do" in math or "what the book…teaches," Javier's conceptualized the math teaching and learning as unsanctioned or insider "tricks."

What made instruction effective for struggling youth readers? What constituted the "tricks" that helped Javier learn math when he had struggled in previous school years? I observed that the literacy instructional contexts that supported readers' skills, practices, and identities (and instruction that youth reported enjoying and learning from) were disciplinary in nature and appropriately scaffolded. By disciplinary, I mean that these instructional contexts were more often than not grounded in disciplinary practices, anchored in disciplinary texts, and aimed to build disciplinary knowledge rather than decontextualized skills. By scaffolded, I mean that teachers provided adequate support for students to engage with disciplinary texts and in disciplinary thinking, and as students became more adept at engaging with these, teachers strategically (and as quickly as possible) reduced their support. Because literacy instruction appeared to benefit focal participants when it was simultaneously disciplinary and scaffolded, I examine these aspects of instruction in tandem in the following section.

Disciplinary and Scaffolded Literacy Instruction

To illustrate why and how these disciplinary literacy and scaffolded instruction bolstered focal participants' reading I closely examine four instances of classroom instruction—two in history and two in mathematics. For U.S. History, I document (a) supportive instructional contexts during primary source document analysis in Ms.

Talbot's class and (b) less supportive (if not constraining) instructional contexts during primary source analysis in Mr. Robin's class. For Algebra, I document (a) supportive instructional contexts during a lesson on reading coordinate planes in Mr. Henry's class and (b) constraining instructional contexts during a lesson on exponential functions in Ms. Malloy's class. All four classes were low-track courses in which students identified as struggling readers were clustered. By juxtaposing examples of supportive and limiting instruction in the same content areas across different classrooms, I show how teachers (with students) constructed disciplinary literacy and scaffolded instructional contexts and how those contexts benefitted focal participants. I also show that with little or no attention to disciplinary and scaffolded literacy instruction, struggling readers experienced (and were positioned to experience) difficulty.

Although I provide an equal number of exemplars for positive and constraining instructional contexts, struggling readers tended to experience constraining instruction (and relatedly, constraining classroom social contexts, which I discussed throughout the chapter). I devote attention to examining effective but less common instructional contexts—and how struggling readers participated in them—in order to illustrate when and why particular classes tended to engage youth and foster literacy learning. I organize the following exemplars by classroom teacher because, as I discussed in Chapter 2 and in this chapter's introduction, even though contexts span across classrooms spaces and times, participants tended to construct a predictable range of contexts in a given classroom space over time. Analysis showed, for example, that Mr. Henry and students tended to construct supportive social and instructional contexts where as Mr. Robin and students tended to construct constraining contexts.

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Finally, the following four exemplars are representative of each teacher's instruction as well students' response and participation in instructional contexts. In addition, each of the eight focal participants was scheduled into at least one of the following four teachers' classrooms (see Table 3.4, *Classroom Observations,* Chapter 3, p. 72). Therefore I present the following four exemplars as illustrative of sample-wide patterns I identified across eight teachers' classrooms.

Supportive instructional contexts in Ms. Talbot's history class. In March and April 2013, Ms. Talbot and other ninth grade U.S. history teachers taught a unit on imperialism in which students studied among other things the American annexation of Hawaii. To answer the question "Why and how did the United States annex Hawaii?", students read and discussed multiple primary source documents. On the day of the document analysis activity, Ms. Talbot began with a ten-minute lecture on imperialism and Hawaii that built prior and necessary knowledge for reading.

During the lecture, Aziza, a focal participant, did not take notes even though that was the expectation for students. Aziza was coughing and looked tired, and instead of her usual brightly colored, coordinated outfit, she was wearing gray sweatpants and a sweatshirt with holes. Aziza was not engaged in the lesson, but Ms. Talbot took steps to involve and interest Aziza in the historical reading activity.

Posing disciplinary questions with primary source texts. Ms. Talbot introduced the document analysis activity by drawing students' attention to the overarching question on the board, "Why and how did the United States annex Hawaii?". She then displayed the first document, "Petition Against Annexation," on the document camera and led students through guided reading. (By this time in the school year, the students had

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completed at least four document analyses. Whereas Ms. Talbot used to do guided

reading or modeling with multiple primary source documents, during this lesson she

reduced the scaffolding by leading whole-group reading instruction with only one

document because students had developed the skills and practices to read multiple

primary sources in groups.) In the 1897 petition, the Hawaiian Patriotic League of the

Hawaiian Islands protested President McKinley and the United States Senate's decision

to assume control of Hawaii. During guided reading, Ms. Talbot supported students'

historical inquiry by prompting with questions such as: "What is it? Okay, what is a

petition?", "Who is it to?", "Who is writing it?", "What do they want?", "Is this a primary

or secondary source? Why does it matter?" These questions encouraged students to

consider the authors' perspective, the sociohistorical time period in which the petition

was written, and the implications of the text's genre.

 Engaging a struggling reader through discussion. Ms. Talbot led the discussion

with enthusiasm, and her questions appeared to help students engage with the text. Aziza

slowly became interested in the text-based discussion. She commented, "But what do the

Hawaiians want?" Ms. Talbot praised Aziza's contribution, "Beautiful, Aziza! These are

the questions we want to ask ourselves. We know they want something, but what is it?"

Aziza appeared buoyed by the positive and public interaction with Ms. Talbot, and Aziza

smiled and began annotating her copy of the text.

 Scaffolding with groups and a reading guide. As the class analyzed the petition,

Ms. Talbot encouraged them and their disciplinary literacy practices, "This is hard critical

thinking, but you can do it and ask questions. This is what historians do." Next, Ms.

Talbot organized students into groups and asked them to review excerpts from several

other primary source documents: *Missionary Work in Hawaii* by Rev. Dr. Bacon, July 1872; *The Sandwich Islands: 1. The advantages of Annexation* by Lorrin A. Thurston, March 1893; *The Treaty of Reciprocity of 1875*; *1887 Constitution of the Kingdom of Hawaii*; and *United States Becomes a World Power, The Annexation of Hawaii*. To scaffold their reading, Ms. Talbot provided a reading guide. For each document, the guide provided specific questions in the following categories: question you are trying to answer, document information, inferences and conclusions/your understanding, evidence, predict, and reflections/opinion.

Aziza joined her small group and they grappled with two texts. Aziza referenced the reading guide, asked questions, and recorded her groups' ideas. She was an integral member of the group and contributed to the group's meaning making. The class period ended, and students were still reading and discussing texts.

Facilitating text-based discussion. Ms. Talbot concluded the document analysis activity the following day. Students worked in groups to finish reading the documents. When they reconvened as a whole group, Ms. Talbot introduced the final document, *Joint Resolution to Provide for Annexing the Hawaiian Islands to the United States*, 1898. She posed the guiding question, "What did the United States gain and Hawaii Lose?", and asked students to read and consider the document silently for eight minutes. Written by United States government officials, the document not only outlined Hawaii's loss of sovereignty, but also called the annexation a "joint resolution" between Hawaii and the United States. After eight minutes of silent independent reading, Ms. Talbot led a class discussion. (In another example of scaffolding, Ms. Talbot had slowly increased the number of minutes she would ask students to read silently; she reported that students

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could barely read independently for two minutes in the beginning of the year. She attributed this to students' having little to no experience reading historical texts in previous social studies classes.) During the discussion, students synthesized information from the different documents they had read and discussed United States imperialism. As one student realized that the United States had annexed Hawaii despite Hawaiian residents' protests, she was outraged, "How can you just go in and take over?!" Another student responded that this was "just what happened to the American Indians," which was an explicit connection to another sociohistorical period and events about which students had read earlier in the year.

The document analysis activity engaged students in disciplinary literacy practices that generated disciplinary knowledge. The goal was not simply to understand or summarize texts but to read across texts to answer historical questions. As youth readers engaged with complex primary source texts, Ms. Talbot scaffolded them by teaching prior knowledge, guiding whole-group reading, providing a reading guide, and encouraging their disciplinary literacy efforts. Aziza and other struggling reader participants, Mai See and Janice in their respective class periods with Ms. Talbot, appeared engaged with texts and made positive contributions to small group discussions.

Constraining instructional contexts in Mr. Robin's history class. As a point of comparison, Mr. Robin taught a similar low-track ninth grade history class, and he enacted a similar activity about the annexation of Hawaii. However, instead of calling it document analysis, which refers to the reading practices of historians, he called the activity "stations," which is a generic school term for rotating small group work. Although Mr. Robin began with the same historical question as Ms. Talbot, "How and

why did the United States annex Hawaii?", there was little in the lesson to keep the disciplinary question at the fore. For example, Mr. Robin's lesson did not begin with whole group guided reading to model historical inquiry. He began with a writing prompt on the board: "What were three things you learned about Hawaii from Friday's activity?" Evan raised his hand and said, "I wasn't here on Friday." Mr. Robin handed Evan notes to copy but did not discuss (or ask another student to discuss with Evan) the conversation from Friday's class. During the writing exercise, one-third of the class did not write.

Rotating through stations instead of synthesizing across texts. After the writing activity, there was no discussion about what students had learned about Hawaii. Instead students immediately rotated among four stations, and at each station they read a primary source document and answered questions. I did not observe opportunities for students to synthesize across texts or discuss how the texts answered the overarching question. During the station activity, focal participants, Mark and Calvin, read only intermittently and discussed things unrelated to the reading. I observed that the class's high-achieving students (those whom Mr. Robin reported were earning As and reading well) engaged with the activity and answered all of the reading questions, but there was little scaffolding for struggling youth readers. Moreover, despite the fact that the high-achieving students completed the assignment, they did not appear engaged in disciplinary practices such as comparing multiple perspectives and considering authors' biases. At the end of the class, Mr. Robin explained that students would next be reading about and discussing the Philippines. One student asked, "Why are we learning about the Philippines when it's U.S. History?" Mr. Robin said, "You'll find out." The student rolled his eyes and sighed with exasperation. As this illustrates, students had difficulty integrating learning from

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class to class, and Mr. Robin missed opportunities like this one to leverage students'

curiosity and help youth build knowledge across literacy experiences.

Reading with generic strategies instead of disciplinary practices. After the

station activity, I asked Mark, what it was like to read primary documents. He said,

"What is hard is figuring out if the question is about the whole passage or just one piece."

I asked, "How do you figure it out?" He said, "Read the whole thing and then read the

question again." Although Mark had a reading strategy, it was a time intensive one,

particularly with complicated primary source documents. If Mark did not have strategies

(and knowledge) to effectively and efficiently read assigned texts, this could help explain

why Mark stopped reading and talked to Calvin during the activity. Moreover, Mark's

strategy was not a disciplinary practice. I asked if Mark if this was a similar strategy that

he used English language arts, for example. He said, "I pretty much read the same ways

in history and English."

In contrast to Mr. Robin's instructional contexts, Ms. Talbot's instruction

afforded opportunities for all readers to employ disciplinary literacy practices and build

disciplinary knowledge. In addition to what I discussed previously, Ms. Talbot's

questions such as, "What did the U.S. want?", "But what did Hawaii want?", and "How

do you know?" encouraged students to assume multiple perspectives across primary

documents and make text-based claims. Ms. Talbot also encouraged students to read and

build knowledge collaboratively; she said, "It's always good to bounce ideas off other

people during document analysis." This suggestion along with other scaffolds (e.g., small

groups, jointly completed graphic organizers, roles for group members) supported

struggling youth readers to engage in disciplinary reading and discussion.

Supportive instructional contexts in Mr. Henry's math class. In a second example of effective instructional contexts, Mr. Henry taught a lesson on coordinate planes in which he focused on the following aspects of mathematical literacy: building technical vocabulary, practicing oral language conventions of mathematics, and translating across symbol systems. During the lesson, he scaffolded students, activated and built on their prior knowledge, and praised their positive contributions. Like all of the students in the low-track algebra class, Keisha was highly engaged. Her level of participation, engagement, and positive social interactions in this class was much higher than in reading and history classes in which she tended to refuse to participate and/or was sent to in-school suspension.

Facilitating mathematical discussions and positive classroom discourse. Mr. Henry drew an x- and y-axis on the board and began by asking, "What do you remember or know about coordinate planes?" Many students called out responses, and Mr. Henry encouraged the overlapping talk by listening and then echoing individual students' comments. Mr. Henry had told me that he did "call and response" instruction and allowed multiple students to simultaneously volunteer answers in this class more than other classes because it seemed to increase student participation. I observed that this discursive practice appeared to align to students' practices, and it created an energetic, positive climate in which students appeared interested in discussing mathematics. In an interview, I asked Keisha about call and response style.

Julie: You know what I noticed in your class when I was there, (Mr. Henry) also

makes you guys say (the new mathematical terms) a lot. He says

something and then…

Keisha: (overlapping) you have to repeat it after him. That helps us like, stick it in

our head.

During the lesson as Mr. Henry synthesized comments to collaboratively build

mathematical knowledge, he credited students for their contributions. For example, he

said, "According to Amber, this section of the graph is negative." In this way he

emphasized students' voices and publicly valued their ideas. Mr. Henry built on Amber's

comment by asking, "Why is this section of the graph negative?" Questions such as these

helped the instruction go beyond a step-by-step guide to plotting points on a graph, and

situated skill-building in a substantive discussion about the intellectual problems involved

with interpreting and manipulating coordinate planes in mathematics.

'Showing' instead of 'reviewing' vocabulary as a means of knowledge building.

One student pointed to the center of the graph and said, "That point is like zero zero." Mr.

Henry confirmed this and asked what "that point" is called. No one responded, and so

Mr. Henry said, "It starts with 'o'." A chorus of students yelled out words that began with

'o,' and one student said "Origin." Mr. Henry said, "Origin, right! Let's say it together."

The students collectively responded, "origin." Mr. Henry then taught the oral language

conventions associated with mathematical terms, "point," and "origin," and how to

discuss (0, 0) on a coordinate plane. He said to say "point," is not wrong, but "origin is

more precise." To help students understand, he said saying "origin" is like saying

formally "hello" and "goodbye" in an interview situation, and saying "point" is like

saying informally "hey" and "see ya" to friends. Neither was wrong, he explained, but in

mathematics, "we want to use formal mathematical terms," so calling (0, 0) "the origin"

is more appropriate than "point." In an interview, Keisha explained that in Mr. Henry's

class,

> We just learn the words, you know. (Mr. Henry) wasn't there yesterday, so we
>
> had a substitute teacher and that's when we reviewed the word, but (the
>
> substitute) didn't really show us. Probably will tomorrow, (Mr. Henry) will show
>
> us.

Keisha differentiated between showing and reviewing words. By 'showing' words and

mathematical concepts through extended discussion, multiple examples, student

participation, instead of superficially 'reviewing' math terms, Mr. Henry helped students

build mathematical knowledge.

   Translating across symbol systems and using mathematical language. After

students identified the quadrants and the origin, Mr. Henry began teaching how to

translate across symbol systems. He wrote (2, 3) on the board and asked someone to point

to its location on the graph. One student, Deanne, pointed to the 2 on the x-axis but could

not identify the correct place on the y-axis. Mr. Henry complimented her for beginning at

the correct point on the x-axis, "Good, always start at the x-axis. Now should I go up

three or down three?" He not only explicitly taught how to translate between (2, 3) and

the visual representation of the point in the graph, but he also again taught mathematical

oral language by asking, "How do we say this?" Students were saying "two three," and

Mr. Henry said that mathematicians say "two comma three" when discussing points. It

was not enough for students to interpret a point and graph it accurately; he also wanted students to develop the academic language to discuss mathematics. In the next part of class, I observed students using these mathematical terms appropriately during discussions in small groups.

Engaging struggling readers through instruction. Keisha who was reluctant to participate (and often times even attend) reading and history classes participated willingly, and sometimes enthusiastically, in math class. On this particular day, she volunteered to identify the point (-4, 2) on the graph. Keisha walked up to the board and traced her finger to the left on the x-axis to -4, and then up to 2 on the y-axis. Mr. Henry complimented Keisha, "I like the way she did this," and he mimicked her physical movement on the graph. Keisha walked back to her desk smiling. These positive teacher-student interactions appeared to validate Keisha's efforts and contributions in math class.

Javier, the other focal participant in Mr. Henry's class, explained what he found helpful about the instructional contexts of math class.

Julie: Okay, so you tell me why do you like (algebra) class?

Javier: Since we have a two-hour class, we get to take more time to do things, so we don't have to rush through it and if we get through it we can like take more time and ask as many questions as we need.

Institutional decisions involving the school administration and math department to offer a two-hour algebra class shaped the kind of instructional contexts that were possible in the classroom. Notably, instead of being work avoidant, Javier described these instructional contexts ("we don't have to rush," "we can take more time," "ask as many questions as we need") as reasons why he liked the class.

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Mr. Henry scaffolded students' learning by modeling how to read and interpret graphs and explicitly teaching mathematical oral language. He next gave students an assignment in which they needed to plot several points independently for fifteen minutes. After fifteen minutes, they could form groups and help each other with any questions. By giving students a chance to work independently and then rely on each other for questions before coming to him, Mr. Henry shifted the lesson from being teacher-driven to student-centered. Throughout the activity, Keisha and Javier worked diligently both alone and with others. The instructional context—focused on developing mathematical literacy, facilitating learning with appropriate scaffolding, and supporting students' reading/learning identities—bolstered Keisha and Javier as math readers/learners and valued members of a positive classroom community. In a later interview, Keisha said, "Math's probably my favorite class …I can get my work done, like a lot easier because Mr. Henry breaks it down." Similarly, when I asked Javier his favorite time of the school day was, he responded, "Probably math, algebra."

Constraining instructional contexts in Ms. Malloy's math class. In contrast to Mr. Henry's instruction, Ms. Malloy's algebra instruction focused on work completion and behavior management. At different points in this chapter, I have discussed Mark's perspectives on Ms. Malloy's algebra class as well as her perspectives on Mark as a learner and behavior problem. (Mark was the only focal participant scheduled in Ms. Malloy's math class). In the following exemplar, for the sake of showing patterns in student-teacher instructional interactions, I note other students' contributions in Mark's low-track algebra class.

Missing opportunities to address students' questions. In one lesson, Ms. Malloy
began by asking students if they had questions about the homework. Students did not ask
any questions, and Ms. Malloy said, "Fine, then pass your homework up." According to
Ms. Malloy, at least 25% of the class was failing, and thus it was unlikely that every
student understood the homework. Yet, there were not processes in place to encourage
students to ask questions and discuss mathematics. As class continued, the following
exchange occurred between Ms. Malloy and students.

Ms. Malloy: We've been doing exponential functions for two weeks…

Lyla: (interruption and overlapping)…and I **still** don't get it. (*Many
students laughed and nodded their heads in agreement.*)

Ms. Malloy: You can use your notes on homework and quizzes. (*Students looked
surprised.*)

Ms. Malloy: You've **always** been able to use your notes.

The fact that students did not know they could use their notes was evidence of poor
communication between the teacher and students. Moreover, that this interaction did not
spark a discussion about exponential functions and students' persisting questions
(particularly after students silently turned in homework on exponential functions)
demonstrated the extent to the instructional contexts did not foster discussion or address
students' questions.

Reprimanding instead of instructing. Ms. Malloy continued on to give a lecture
entitled "Exponential relationships including interest." While she spoke, she recorded
notes on an overhead projector that students were told to copy. During the lecture, the
only interaction between the teacher and students were behavioral reprimands. In fact,

during the course of the 55-minute class, the teacher redirected or called out students (e.g., "Pay attention, Francis!", "I'll wait...I'll keep waiting," "Stop talking," "Okay, put the phone away now.") 27 times. Behavior remediation interrupted the teaching and learning of exponential functions on a nearly minute-to-minute basis.

Illustrative of such interruptions was an exchange Ms. Malloy had with one student, Drake, during the lecture. Drake asked to go to the bathroom. Ms. Malloy said no. Drake became upset and asked again. Ms. Malloy walked to the board and put a check mark next to Drake's name. (Ms. Malloy had a behavior system in which she recorded students' names on the board when they were not paying attention, and used a check mark for a second offense.) Drake said, "She acts like a check is going to stop me." Drake walked up to the board and erased the check mark; he then walked to the overhead projector and said, "Look I can erase that, too." He erased part of Ms. Malloy's notes and then walked out to use the bathroom. Students were not permitted to leave the room without permission. Later in the class period, another student, Sheila, also walked out of the room when Ms. Malloy asked her a question about math. Sheila did not acknowledge the question but said, "I'm going to get a drink." Ms. Malloy picked up the classroom phone to call security.

Unlike Mr. Henry's class, the teacher lead the way in constructing instructional contexts through tense interactions about rule following. Students such as Lyla, Drake, Sheila helped construct contexts and asserted their power in various ways, but Ms. Malloy ultimately commanded authority and had the backing of security and administrative personnel to influence students. The instructional contexts of this math

class not only failed to foreground disciplinary literacy and scaffolding, but also afforded little in the way of meaning-focused mathematics instruction.

Looking across supportive and constraining instructional contexts. Like many low-track classrooms, Ms. Malloy's teaching, along with Mr. Robin's, was constrained by negative teacher-student interactions and an emphasis on student compliance. Conversely, Mr. Henry and Ms. Talbot's instruction illustrated promising (albeit rare) contexts for student learning among low-track classes. Mr. Henry's lesson on reading and producing graphical texts and Ms. Talbot's lesson on reading historical texts supported struggling youth readers by using scaffolded text-based instruction to build disciplinary knowledge, contextualized literacy skills, and positive literacy/academic identities. Notably, each lesson provided time for students to read independently instead of 'protecting' struggling youth readers from complex texts. As Aziza, Mai See, Janice, Keisha, and Javier participated in their respective instructional contexts, they marshaled and developed their reading-related identities, skills, and practices in the service of disciplinary learning. Equally important, they participated as valued members of these learning communities and helped construct positive contexts for learning.

Conclusion

Across classroom spaces and times, when focal participants experienced rigorous literacy instruction embedded in trusting, respectful, and caring relationships, youth tended to youth tended to (a) express positive feelings about themselves, their teachers, and their class contexts; (b) appear engaged, motivated, and agentic as learners/readers; and (c) demonstrate proficient or improving reading-related skills and practices. Notably, rather than passively experiencing these supportive classroom contexts, focal participants

helped construct these productive spaces with their social and academic contributions.

However, when youths' interactions with classroom contexts hampered their literacy

learning, (e.g., navigating negative behavior positioning, having limited scaffolds for

reading complex texts), youth had less power than teachers and administrators to improve

contexts. In these instances, I observed focal participants negotiate contexts with

resilience and wit, but I also observed them become overwhelmed and opt out of

classroom learning (either physically by leaving class or mentally/emotionally by

choosing not to participate). In classrooms such Mr. Henry's and Ms. Talbot's, however,

youth opted in to rigorous learning and productive socializing.

Close analysis of Mr. Henry's and Ms. Talbot's lessons shows how robust

instructional contexts and positive social contexts worked in tandem and mutually

enforced one another to support struggling youth readers. Positive student-teacher

interactions and classroom climates facilitated literacy learning, and good instruction

fostered productive relationships. Contrary to notions that struggling readers are work

avoidant, focal participants reported enjoying classes *because* teachers engaged them

instructionally. Earlier in this chapter, I documented Keisha and Javier making this claim.

Similarly, Calvin said he liked one of his classes because the teacher "makes us do a lot

of reading and stuff." Struggling readers wanted to learn.

In an interview Mai See discussed the connection between learning and reading.

She explained that reading was challenging when "there's vocabulary and you have to

learn things you don't understand." Mai See's statement is a powerful reminder about one

of the purposes and challenges of school reading—"to learn things you don't

understand." Mai See and other participants articulated not only a desire to learn, but also what kind of teaching helped them.

> Julie: What do you think about reading (in science)? Is it pretty easy to understand or is it difficult sometimes?
>
> Mai See: Sometimes it's difficult but then after you learn a little bit, then it's easy.
>
> ….
>
> Julie: So what do you learn that makes the reading easier?
>
> Mai See: …You would learn by doing it. Like, if there's like an experiment you have to do and like, you kind of confused and then, after you do an experiment, then you kind of get it, like how it works.

Similar to Keisha's explanation that she learned vocabulary because Mr. Henry would "show" the words instead of superficially "review" the words, Mai See explained that she learned new concepts by "doing." Meaningfully engaging with new disciplinary concepts and words through an experiment in science or a student-centered discussion in math helped struggling readers build knowledge and "get…how it works."

This kind of rigorous teaching and learning was made possible, in part, by positive student-teacher relationships. As I reported in Keisha's extended case study in Chapter 4, Mr. Henry articulated the powerful interaction between good relationships and academic learning when he said, "I think if you have kids that have a teacher that they feel like they have an honest relationship with and that there is trust and genuine care both ways, that (students) try harder, that they're more engaged…I've built that trust that I don't waste their time." When teachers with focal participants constructed productive

social and instructional classroom contexts, young people were positioned and positioned

themselves as engaged and active learners.

CHAPTER VI

Institutional Contexts:

Interrelated Reading Intervention and Behavior Management Dimensions

Introduction

As I discussed in Chapter 5, the social and instructional dimensions of classroom contexts mediated struggling readers. In Chapter 6, I extend this analysis to examine how institutional contexts interacted with classroom contexts to mediate participants' reading-related skills, identities, and practices. In order to explicate how struggling readers were identified and constructed in this study, an examination of institutional contexts is critical because institutional contexts (and participants interactions among them) permeated classrooms. That is, what and how students learned in a given class period and who young people were as learners and readers were mediated by factors beyond classroom walls. Indeed, instructional, social, and institutional dimensions of school contexts dynamically evolved as actors participated simultaneously in multiple networks of social interactions.

For instance, the district mandated and monitored the implementation of particular reading programs, which influenced both the kinds of reading support that were available to struggling readers and the kinds of instructional decisions teachers made as they navigated mandated curricula. Thus, understanding how focal participants' social

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and instructional interactions mediated demonstrations of reading proficiency and difficulty requires an examination of the institutional contexts that interacted among classroom spaces.

Main Findings Related to Institutional Contexts

Institutional contexts that were particularly important in the construction of struggling readers included reading intervention processes (e.g., struggling reader identification processes, tracking) and compliance-oriented behavior management approaches (punitive disciplinary action, disproportionately high rates of suspension among struggling readers) (see the Key Linkage Chart, Figure 4.1, Chapter 4, p. 87). First, I examine the institutional arrangements and processes related to reading intervention, specifically (a) struggling reader identification processes, (b) secondary scheduling practices (e.g., tracking), and (c) school and district literacy initiatives. Next I discuss contextual dimensions related to behavior management including (a) the school's culture of compliance and (b) school and district behavior policies including trends and variability in policy implementation. As I examine actors' participation across (and construction of) these contexts, I show how district and school oversight worked in tandem to support institutional norms for reading intervention and behavior management.

In the remainder of the chapter's introduction, I discuss the important roles of power and authority as well as deficit discourses that were evident among institutional contexts. I then preview the organization and presentation of analysis in the chapter. Finally, I revisit the case of Keisha, a touchstone throughout the dissertation, to illustrate the institutionalized processes undergirding reading intervention and behavior management that mediated her experiences as a reader and young person in ninth grade.

Keisha's case is also representative of the sample in that all youth navigated institutional contexts, and their reading skills, identities, and practices

Power and Authority among Institutional Contexts

Before examining institutional contexts, it is important to preview and clarify the important roles of power and authority as actors construct, resist, and maintain systems-wide processes and arrangements. In Chapter 2, I drew on Foucault (1972) to articulate a theorization of power as a dynamic manifestation (not a possession) that individuals express unpredictably across complex social networks, and I distinguished between power and authority. In the example of school contexts, although institutional and classroom contexts did not exist in a strict hierarchy, authority to position young people as deficient and proficient readers or as "behavior problems," a term used by school personnel, was weighted toward school officials who enacted sanctioned policies. For instance, school and district administrators and policymakers had more authority than teachers and students to establish institutional agendas and influence systems-level practices. Despite this arrangement, power flowed among all of the study's participants, and I show when and how actors resisted hierarchies of authority.

In Chapter 5, I documented a particularly illustrative example of resistance, and I revisit it here in order to highlight the interaction between institutional and classroom contexts. One reading teacher, Ms. French, chose to use young adult fiction texts from her personal library, which were not a part of the district's sanctioned reading program. Although the district intervention coordinator expressed concern and urged Ms. French to use the program's texts, Ms. French suffered no real consequences in terms of job security, compensation loss, or poor teacher evaluation. Ms. French continued to make

her book collection available throughout the year, but because she initially tried to comply with the mandate, district oversight influenced how late in the year (November) she introduced the books and, subsequently, when youth had access to a wider variety of texts. For participants Calvin and Keisha, access to Ms. French's high-interest young adult fiction resulted in a pronounced increase in interest and engagement with text. Their delayed access to Ms. French's book collection affected their literacy learning as they resisted and refused to read texts from the reading program in the beginning of the school year.

Similar to Ms. French, youth also harnessed power and showed acts of resistance as they interacted among institutional contexts. For example, Mark helped create a petition to have a math teacher dismissed for ineffective teaching; Janice refused to leave reading class when Ms. French sent her to in-school suspension; and Keisha read her cell phone instead of school texts during class time. These expressions of power, however, did not fundamentally shift institutional authority and, in some cases, had negative repercussions for youth: Mark's math teacher continued to teach his class; Ms. French called security personnel to escort Janice to suspension; and teachers confiscated Keisha's cell phone or sent her to suspension. Even as power shifted through social interactions and authority tended to reside with administrators and teachers, I show how students acted with agency to navigate and co-construct institutional contexts.

Deficit Discourses among Institutional Contexts

In addition to the roles of power and authority, another analytical thread that runs throughout my discussion concerns institutionalized deficit discourses. I show how actors used deficit discourses to both help construct and maintain institutional contexts.

Specifically, students, teachers, and administrators adopted (or helped create) institutionalized discourses for reading (difficulty) that mediated classroom teaching and learning. In one example, teachers adopted Response to Intervention (RTI) categories and labels for struggling readers (i.e., Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3). (RTI is a federally mandated intervention approach involving increasingly supportive 'tiers' of intervention if students continue to demonstrate learning needs on recursive rounds of assessments.) Ms. Knox said, "I get the behaviors, you know, the Tier 2 and 3 students." As I discussed in Chapter 5, reading and behavior labels were conflated at Moore High, and the teachers' use of RTI terms helped to institutionalize and reinforce a perception that literacy and behavior problems were intertwined issues, which then contributed to the deficit positioning of young people as 'Tier 2 and 3 behaviors.' Throughout my analysis, I show how institutional discourses mediated not only participants' understandings of reading difficulty, but also young people's demonstration of reading skills, identities, and practices.

Organization and Presentation of Analysis

As in Chapter 5, I focus attention on school personnel's interactions among contexts because teachers and administrators, by virtue of their positions, had more authority than students to maintain and resist institutional contexts. Because improving literacy learning contexts requires authority to implement change, it is important to understand how teachers and administrators leverage their authority in ways that mediate youth reading. In addition to teachers' perspectives, I also examine students' perspectives, though to a lesser degree, in order to show how youth experienced and attempted to manipulate institutional contexts.

Throughout the chapter I return to the cases of Keisha and Mark, as I did Chapter 5, in order to closely examine youths' perspective and/or to demonstrate the same youths movement across contexts. I highlight Keisha and Mark (and their teachers) for the purposes building on previously presented data to articulate a rich and detailed account of the interaction between struggling readers and school contexts. (As discussed in Chapter 3, during data collection, I devoted equal amounts of time to observing and interviewing each of the eight focal participants.) To show patterns evident in the data, I also present exemplars of the other five focal participants. Taking account of multiple actors' perspectives, I illustrate the mechanisms by which systems-wide contexts mediated students as readers and young people. Like Keisha and Mark, all of the focal participants demonstrated more and less proficient reading through their interactions with institutional contexts.

As in Chapter 5, I organize my analysis by main assertions rather than participant case studies. Throughout the chapter I draw on multiple data sources (e.g. interviews, observations, school records) involving various participant groups (e.g., teachers, students) to warrant claims about the complex relationship between institutional contexts and struggling readers.

Institutionalizing Reading Struggle and Behavior Problems: Keisha's Case Revisited

For the purposes of Chapter 6, I return to Keisha to highlight how her interactions among institutional contexts—particularly processes for struggling reader identification and behavior management—mediated her construction as a struggling reader.

When Keisha arrived at Moore High School, she said that she did not "need extra help with reading…I know how to read." Keisha enjoyed reading young adult fiction and online texts (social networking websites, song lyrics) and reported reading at home and in school. When Keisha was placed in Read 180, she said it "was not fair," and she wrote on the first day of school, "I wasn't supposed to be in this class. I'm not going to like it one bit." However, institutionalized processes for reader identification—which considered assessment scores, grades, intervention history, and school behavior records—indicated that Keisha needed reading support. Middle school teachers and the high school literacy coach considered the following data: Keisha scored an 852 Lexile on the Scholastic Reading Inventory, which was below Moore High's 1000 Lexile benchmark for ninth grade reading. She attained below average grades in middle school and experienced difficulty with content area coursework. In addition, Keisha had a history of reading intervention (Read 180 in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades), and her official school records documented behavior problems, which teachers interpreted as low school engagement.

According to these data and despite the fact that Keisha had been enrolled in Read 180 for three years, institutional processes slotted Keisha into Read 180, which was one of three reading intervention classes for students without disabilities at Moore High. Keisha was too low achieving for Applied Literacy, the intervention for 'higher skilled' students, and too high achieving for System 44, the decoding intervention for 'lower skilled' students. Thus scheduling practices necessitated her placement into Read 180, which Keisha said made her feel "slow." Moreover, she reported that although reading in Read 180 used to be fun, now it was "boring." Institutional mechanisms by which Keisha

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was repeatedly placed in Read 180 mediated her identity as a learner and her engagement with reading—and thus her opportunities to improve reading skills and practices as she resisted participation in the class.

At the same time that institutional contexts mediated her struggling reader identification, they also mediated her behavior and engagement in school. School- and district-wide punitive discipline approaches that disproportionately affected youth of color (which I examine in detail later in the chapter) mediated how teachers perceived and responded to Keisha who was African American. Although the average behavior referral per student was 1.38 during the 2012-2013 school year, Keisha received 14 referrals. Referrals led to in and out-of-school suspension and missed instruction. This punitive approach to behavior management meant that Keisha systematically missed opportunities to engage in literacy and content area learning. In the midst of frequent institutionally mandated absences, Keisha appeared to have difficulty reintegrating into classroom learning and social life. Equally important, her classroom contexts were not designed to support youth with recurring transitions in and out of school, which one teacher explained led students to "act-out because they don't want to be embarrassed" when they are confused from missing instruction. Thus, the cycle of behavior referrals, suspensions, missed instruction, and difficult reintegration was self-reinforcing.

Institutional mechanisms for behavior management and reader identification mediated Keisha's classroom experiences. As she navigated history, math, and reading classes, she participated in (and constructed) not only social and instructional contexts, but also institutional contexts. Her simultaneous participation in various school contexts mediated her reading identities, skills, and practices. In this chapter, I draw on data not

only from Keisha and her teachers, but also from other participants to closely examine institutional contexts and what participation among them meant for struggling youth readers' literacy learning and social engagement in school.

Reading Intervention Dimensions of Institutional Contexts

Institutional contexts demanded the reading-related identification and labeling of students for the purposes of district, state, and federal accountability. For example, district and school literacy initiatives and Response to Intervention compliance efforts required that incoming ninth graders be tested for reading problems and labeled as struggling or proficient. The school and district monitored the change in number of struggling readers over time. According to school-derived criteria (which I discuss later), struggling readers were scheduled into leveled reading intervention classes. Through these institutional processes, school officials sought to identify and support students' literacy learning needs. Despite good intentions, however, the reader identification processes and tracked intervention classes had unintended consequences.

When students were scheduled into reading classes, they were clustered with other struggling readers across their content area classes, which resulted in de facto tracking. In low-track classes, teachers reported that students were on average lower skilled and had more behavior problems than students in 'regular' or honors classes; teachers' perceptions of these classes mediated the instruction and learning. Moreover, young people of color were over represented in low-track classes, which contributed to the segregation of students' by race and ethnicity. In 13 low-track classes that were a part of the study, youth of color constituted on average 67% of class enrollment even though youth of color were 56% of the school population. Segregation was related to inequitable

learning opportunities, and in a 2012-2013 annual report, the district documented a widening achievement gap between African American and white students.

Once students were tracked, the rigidity and complexity of the high school master schedule made it difficult to change students' schedules and thus difficult for teachers to flexibly respond to students' learning needs/strengths. In summary, the processes by which young people were identified as needing reading support and the subsequent scheduling practices that clustered struggling readers in rigidly organized tracked classes served as key institutional processes for mediating young people's reading skills, practices, and identities.

In the following subsections, I examine actors' participation among school institutional contexts related to reading intervention efforts: (a) struggling reader identification processes, (b) secondary scheduling practices, and (c) school and district literacy initiatives.

Struggling Reader Identification Processes

The processes by which ninth graders were identified as struggling readers involved a variety of data sources (e.g., assessments, behavior records) and school personnel. In this section, I first describe those processes. Then, by examining students' and teachers' perspectives, I show how struggling reader identification processes served as institutional contexts that mediated youths' reading identities, skills, and practices.

"Not an exact science": Screening Incoming Ninth Graders. A host of institutionalized assessments and processes helped determine whether or not students were considered struggling readers. Among them were incoming ninth graders' scores on multiple assessments including the Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI), Aimsweb,

Explore, and the state reading assessment. The school charged the high school literacy coach, Ms. Long, with leading efforts to identify and place struggling readers, and according Ms. Long, the process was "not an exact science." In addition to assessments, Ms. Long explained that she and administrators considered middle school behavior data, grades, and teacher recommendations in order to identify not only the

> …squeaky wheels…(but also) those kids who were just kind of quietly flunking their classes and quietly being really bad readers.

Identification as a struggling reader meant automatic enrollment in a reading intervention class. Moore High budgeted more fiscal resources for struggling readers than it had in previous years and increased its number of reading classes from three in 2010 to 12 classes in 2012. (In this chapter, I discuss the identification process for struggling readers without special education or English language learner (ELL) services. Including special-education-only reading classes, the school offered 16 reading classes.)

The district provided the same amount of funding for literacy education to each high school even though each student performance on literacy assessments varied across schools. For example, 39% of Moore High compared to 62% of Forest High (the highest achieving school in the district) scored at the proficient and advanced levels on the state assessment in 2012-2013. Despite Moore High's increase in programmatic services, Ms. Long described the district's funding allocations as "inequitable." Ms. Long explained that if Moore High used the same criteria to identify struggling readers as Forest High used (both schools used the state assessment in combination with other data as described earlier in the chapter), then 60% of Moore High's total student population would be enrolled in intervention classes—an untenable number given the available resources.
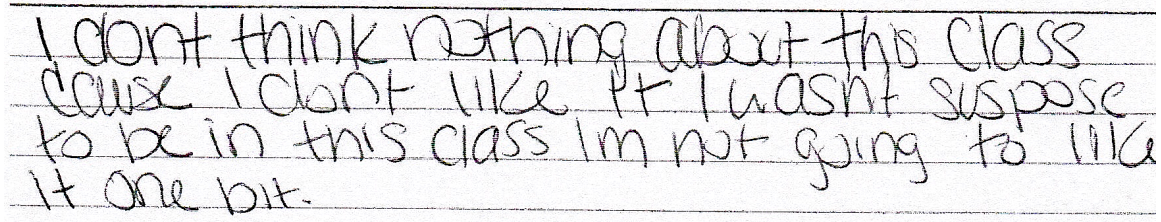
Thus what qualified a student for reading support (and a struggling reader label) in one school might not in a different school. Ms. Long believed that funding should be allocated according to the demonstrated literacy needs of each school's population, and from her perspective, the "politics" of the district and the power commanded by Forest High's middle class families prevented changes in the funding model. Thus, mediated by institutional funding, struggling reader identification was relative across the district. Yet, once students were labeled as struggling readers at Moore High, the designation had permanence, which I describe next.

Students' responses to struggling reader identification processes. Working within the school's resources and according to Moore High's flexible criteria, the literacy coach identified incoming ninth graders for supplementary reading instruction. Because the reading program had expanded, some ninth graders who were not identified as struggling readers in middle school were scheduled into high school intervention classes. During the summer, Ms. Long reviewed data and consulted with the principal to make intervention placement decisions, but there was no mechanism by which incoming ninth graders or their families were notified of struggling reader identification. In addition, despite the relative nature of the screening process, institutional norms and processes made identification difficult if not impossible to reverse once the school year began.

On the first day of school, then, first-time intervention students, such as focal participants Aziza and Mark, were at best surprised and at worst upset. Indeed, across the reading classes, many students, including those who had been in middle school reading classes, expressed frustration. Students such as Keisha who found themselves in Read 180 for a second, third, or fourth year were particularly unhappy. The following focal
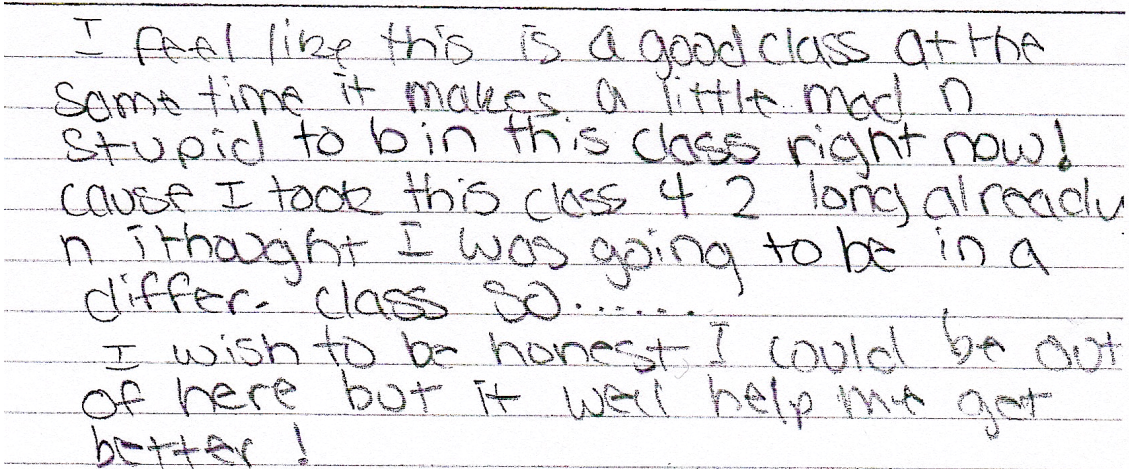
participants' responses to the writing prompt, "How do you feel about being in this class?" were representative of struggling readers' feelings on the first day of school (see Figures 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3). I closely examine them to illustrate how being assigned to a reading class mediated youths' identities and attitudes at the beginning of ninth grade.
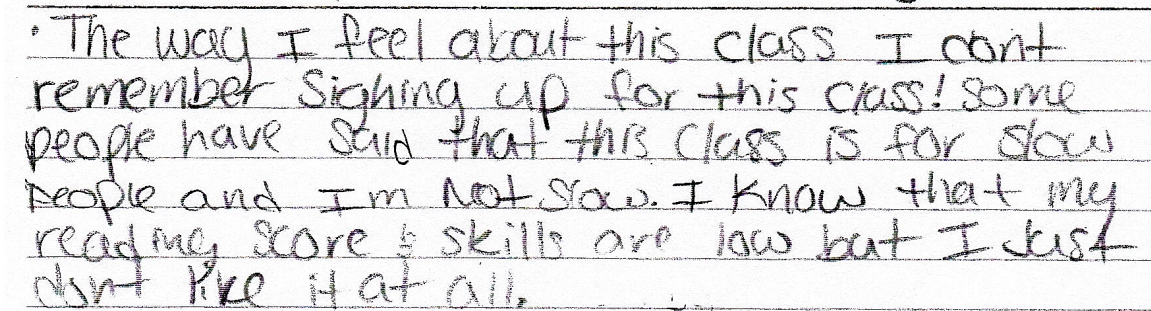
Figure 6.1. Keisha's Response to a Writing Prompt

> I dont think nothing about this class cause I dont like it. I wasnt suppose to be in this class Im not going to like it one bit.

Figure 6.2. Calvin's Response to a Writing Prompt

> I feel like this is a good class at the same time it makes n little mad n stupid to b in this class right now! cause I took this class 4 2 long already n i thought I was going to be in a differ. class so.......
> I wish to be honest I could be out of here but it well help me get better !

Figure 6.3. Janice's Response to a Writing Prompt

> The way I feel about this class I cant remember sighing up for this class! some people have said that this class is for slow people and Im not slow. I know that my reading score & skills are low but I just dont like it at all.

These statements illustrate the extent to which students were not only unaware but also uninvited to participate in institutional processes for reading identification. That the process did not align with other institutionalized processes for scheduling (i.e., registering for classes) exacerbated students' frustration. For instance, Janice protested, "I don't remember signing up for this class!" Similarly, Keisha's statement, "I wasn't supposed to be in this class…" shows that her own struggling reader identification contradicted with her understanding of how secondary scheduling worked.

The students' statements demonstrate how institutional identification as a struggling reader indexed—if not facilitated—deficit-oriented learning identities. Calvin wrote that it made him "mad n (*sic*) stupid to be in this class right now!" Although Janice resisted the deficit label when she said, "people have said that this class is for slow people and I'm not slow," she discussed her reading solely in negative terms of low scores and skills. Using the same deficit language as Janice, Keisha said she was "feeling like I'm slow because I'm in this class" (as I discussed in Chapter 4).

Despite the negative identity ascriptions and feelings of protest, students appeared resigned to their struggling reader identification and intervention. Calvin wrote, "I wish to be honest I could be out of here but it we'll (*sic*) help me get better!" Although students could not opt out of reading classes, they could voice their objections and opinions. Keisha emphatically declared, "I'm not going to like it one bit." Analysis of student writing (as well as observation and interview data which I discussed in Chapter 5) showed that although students had some power to protest, they had less authority than institutional contexts to position themselves as particular kinds of readers and adopt or decline institutionalized reading labels and interventions.

In light of these students' vehement protests, one might wonder if parents or caregivers could have intervened. Although families were not the focus of my study, it was my understanding that caregivers could have objected on behalf of students. To my knowledge, however, none did, and it was likely related to underdeveloped or problem-oriented relationships between the school and families. Indeed, the school did not try to involve families unless teachers were concerned about a young person's behavior or grades. Without avenues for proactive communication, the school did not invite (perhaps even discouraged) families' input on a young person's identification as a struggling reader.

Teachers' perspectives on struggling reader identification processes. Teachers also recognized the limiting nature of the screening process. Ms. French empathized with students' dismay and understood how first-time struggling reader identification could demotivate new high school students. In an interview, Ms. French reported,

> For (students) it's just utter shock…one of my girls in my seventh hour Read 180…she's never, ever been in any reading program at all. So, ninth grade, freshman year, you're going to put her in a reading program? And she all along has been probably calling these kids 'stupid' and that is the 'stupid class.' So, you know, you just think about that—the whole dynamics of that and how that affects a student.

Ms. French acknowledged that students viewed reading classes as being for "stupid" kids, and she realized the complicated "dynamics" involved in suddenly identifying a ninth grader as struggling. To help remedy the situation, she suggested eighth grade teachers should inform students of high school intervention placements in the spring of eighth

grade. Ms. French reasoned that these teachers had established relationships with young people and could communicate why a reading program might help youth. I discussed this idea with the literacy coach, Ms. Long, who headed up these processes, and looking overwhelmed she asked, "How would we do that?" She explained it was logistically impossible to coordinate with all of the middle schools in the district to organize high school reading intervention placements by the end of students' eighth grade year.

Institutional contexts for struggling reader identification and intervention placement positioned teachers, albeit to a lesser degree than students, in constraining ways as teachers worked with district-mandated curriculum and newly labeled, demotivated readers. The previous exemplars are representative of a host of critiques made by both reading teachers in the sample (i.e., Ms. French and Ms. Knox) and Ms. Long. For instance, other concerns and suggestion for improvements included the following: Ms. French criticized Moore High's year-long reading interventions and advocated for flexible programs in and out of which youth could rotate. Ms. Knox suggested that to better meet the needs of incoming ninth graders, new reading classes/programs (e.g., *Read to Achieve*, McGraw Hill, 2013) and high-interest/low-level texts (e.g., *Yummy* by Randy DuBurke) be made available. Ms. Long and Ms. Knox pushed for an increased emphasis on fluency (i.e., reading with speed, accuracy, and prosody) in intervention classes.

Of these recommendations, only fluency instruction gained traction (which did not change struggling reader identification practices and did little to increase meaning-focused literacy instruction as students raced through timed reading passages while still struggling with comprehension questions.) Thus, although teachers had authority to shape

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struggling reader identification and intervention, particularly the literacy coach, there were limits to the changes they could affect in complex institutional processes that involved networks of actors across school spaces. Notably, neither the reading teachers nor the literacy coach articulated that fewer youth should be identified as struggling readers or that intervention programs should be (could be) radically changed (e.g., stand-alone programs dismantled and reading instruction incorporated into core content classes). Thus although teachers and the literacy coach earnestly sought to support youths' literacy learning and identities, their ideas for institutional and programmatic change were mediated—and delimited—by the institutional contexts that both constructed and constrained teachers' authority.

An illustrative case: Mark and the ongoing consequences of struggling reader identification. In the previous sections, I drew on a variety of data sources to document the processes by which Moore High identified struggling readers and how youth and teachers perceived those processes. In order to closely examine how one youth experienced the reader identification process and its ongoing consequences throughout the school year, I next discuss Mark's case, which was representative of other participants. Building on data exemplars presented in Chapter 5 and 6, I return to Mark's case to trace his interactions across contexts and thus explicate the complex ways in which struggling reader identification and intervention placement mediated reading skills, identities, and practices.

Expressing interest in learning and reading as a new ninth grader. Mark began the 2012-2013 school year as an optimistic, school-identified ninth grader. He reported, "I came (to Moore High) for the academic program." In a different interview, he said

"learning at high school could be fun if we could do stuff that's educational…(and they) give us a better learning experience." Mark had come from a public middle school within the district. He was 14 years old and self-identified as African American and Native American. Outside of school he was a dancer involved as a choreographer in a community center breakdance group. He reported being interested in books about

> …World War II, Japanese comics all the way up to Chinese comics all the way up to (books about) American criminals. And, I read an English book from, like, the 1700s.

At the end of eighth grade, middle school teachers recommended Mark for high school reading intervention. Being scheduled into ninth grade Read 180 not only afforded supplementary literacy instruction, it also ascribed an institutional label of struggling reader and clustered Mark with other students identified as struggling readers across content area classes. Both the labeling and the scheduling served as key school contexts that mediated the construction of Mark's reading as a product of his individual struggle to read complex texts.

Identifying a struggling reader with ambiguous assessment data. Mark's identification as a struggling reader coming into high school was somewhat curious because his eighth-grade reading assessment data painted an ambiguous picture of his reading skill and because he reported reading so often. Mark scored in the proficient range on the eighth grade state standardized test for reading, but he scored a 12 on the district-administered standardized test (Explore) falling short of the eighth grade benchmark of 15. His Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) Lexile measure was 820. Despite the fact that SRI indicates a typical eighth grader scores between an 805 Lexile

(L) and 1100L depending on various factors such as the text being read (Scholastic, 2008), Ms. Long, the literacy coach, explained that Lexile scores under 1000, in conjunction with other data, indicated an incoming ninth grader's need for reading support.

In early fall of his ninth grade year, Mark scored a 1262L on the SRI, well above the 1000L benchmark, and he scored in the average range on the Test of Reading Comprehension (TORC). In addition, he read grade-level Read 180 texts with ease and motivation. Given that Mark demonstrated a positive reader identity, productive reading practices, and proficient reading skill in the context of Read 180, Mark's reading teacher considered whether Applied Literacy, an intervention for higher skilled struggling readers, would be a more appropriate class. However, the complexity of Moore High's master schedule and the busy beginning of the school year made it difficult to not only change students' classes, but also move students out of intervention programs, which involved joint decision making among a reading teacher, the school literacy coach, and a guidance counselor. Thus Mark remained enrolled in Read 180. The complexity and rigidity of the high school master schedule served as another context mediating Mark's literacy skills, practices, and identity as a reader by delimiting the nature of the interventions Mark could experience.

Persisting disciplinary literacy learning needs. As the year progressed, Mark continued to read proficiently and earn As in Read 180, but he experienced difficulty across his content area classes. His Grade Point Average (GPA) at the end first semester was 1.43. Field observations and interviews with teachers and Mark showed that many factors contributed to Mark's low achievement (e.g., being scheduled into some low-track

less-than-optimal classes, being positioned as a behavior problem, having poor organization skills, and low work completion). Another factor contributing to Mark's low achievement was under-developed disciplinary literacy knowledge and skills. During reading process interviews conducted with a history text and math text used in Mark's classes as well as a Read 180 narrative text that Mark chose, Mark read the expository school texts less strategically and with less background knowledge than the narrative text. Read 180 was neither identifying nor addressing Mark's disciplinary literacy needs as they related to his school coursework.

Demonstrating agency in the midst of constraining contexts. By midyear Mark seemed less enthusiastic and motivated about high school than he was in the fall. Field observations indicated that he was more socially distant from teachers and peers and less engaged in classroom activities than he was in the fall. In a January interview, Mark discussed his first semester experiences and grades. Mark said, "Moore isn't helping me…I hear Lincoln High has a stronger (academic) program." Although Mark was disillusioned, he had the social acumen and the agency to articulate that much of the problem lay in the school not in him. Despite the setbacks of his ninth grade year—many of which were related to being identified as a struggling reader and carrying that label into low track classes—Mark still identified with school and continued to look for solutions as he wondered if the rival high school across town would be a better place for him.

Although Mark had limited power to influence institutional contexts that positioned him in deficit ways, he tried. As I mentioned in this chapter's introduction, he

worked with other students to petition the administration to dismiss his math teacher, Ms. Malloy. Mark said,

> She just teaches things from her perspective. If you have something to say, it
>
> doesn't matter. Even if you have questions, they don't matter.

Even though Ms. Malloy continued to teach his class, Mark and his classmates pushed against institutional norms and advocated for better instruction. Instead of internalizing poor learning opportunities as his fault, Mark demonstrated agency by explaining that Moore High was not "helping" him. As he considered transferring to a different school— to a new set of institutional contexts—with a "stronger (academic) program," he recognized the institution's role in shaping his experiences as a classroom learner and equally important, his power, under some circumstances, to opt in and out of institutional contexts.

An illustrative case: Calvin and the ongoing consequences of struggling reader identification. Like Mark, other focal participants navigated institutional contexts for reader identification and labeling. Calvin, who was expelled by the end of the year, began as a school-identified ninth grader.

Identifying with school but disliking Read 180. Calvin reported wanting to "get an A for all my classes" and "get more reading knowledge," but Calvin did not like Read 180. Calvin said,

> Dang, that class makes me feel stupid. Skinny little books about that big…Man
>
> it's kind of embarrassing to sit in that class. It (is for) kids that have really bad
>
> reading.

Similar to how many struggling readers felt, Calvin felt embarrassed to attend Read 180. Moreover, Calvin did not think he had "really bad reading." To the contrary, he reported,

> I can ace this class if I wanted to, but I just like, never do my reading. It's so
>
> boring.

Calvin may have been bored in Read 180 because it did not engage his reading skills and knowledge in meaningful ways.

Confusing institutional messages about Calvin's reading skills and knowledge. Similar to Mike, Calvin's placement in Read 180 was questionable. The school simultaneously scheduled Calvin into Read 180 and Honors English. The reading teacher, Ms. French, thought being enrolled in remedial and advanced reading classes at the same time was extremely odd, but she could not get a clear explanation from an administrator or guidance counselor about why Calvin was in both. With the complexity of the school's master schedule and the busyness of the beginning of the school year, Calvin remained enrolled in both until January when he was moved to a regular English class.

Whereas Calvin said he could "ace" Read 180 with those "skinny books," he was overwhelmed by the literacy demands in Honors English. Calvin reported that the books were "so long," and of a recently assigned book, he read 25 of 31 chapters. He also discussed an essay assignment:

Calvin: We had to write up an essay. I was like, 'Oh okay, this is going to be easy'

until (the teacher) started saying all this stuff. I was like…I couldn't

understand. I started asking friends and stuff. I was like, 'Dang man, this

essay may seem kind of hard,' so I just started skipping…I couldn't do it.

If I were to do it… I failed that class this quarter. That sucks.

Julie: Did you try to write the essay?

Calvin: Yeah, I tried but like, I never thought about handing it in.

This exchange demonstrates the extent to which Calvin wanted to do well in school and was disappointed when he did not. He showed motivation in English class by reading the majority of an assigned novel, asking friends for help with a confusing essay assignment, and trying to write the essay. Indeed, the reading and writing effort he put forth in English far surpassed his effort and interest in Read 180 in which he reported being "bored." Because Read 180 did not align to any of the ninth grade curriculum, it did not support Calvin's efforts in English, and the onus was on him to integrate literacy knowledge and skills between the two classes. Teachers missed instructional opportunities during a critical window of time in which Calvin was engaged with reading and writing and actively trying to make sense of complex literacy demands. Without adequate support, Calvin' efforts floundered, and he began to opt out. He did not turn in the English essay, and with a sense of failure, he started skipping class. By the end of first quarter, Calvin was failing Honors English.

Missing opportunities to leverage Calvin's literacy interest and motivation.

Amidst institutional processes that did not overlap, Calvin was scheduled into a reading

intervention class and an advanced English course at the same time. This sent a confusing message to Calvin about his reading skills, knowledge, and identity. From the beginning, struggling reader identification embarrassed him, and he thought the Read 180 texts were boring. Even if the Honors English placement was too advanced (which it may have been), teachers (either the English or reading teacher) could have leveraged the literacy interest and motivation that Calvin demonstrated. Instead, Calvin's significant effort apparently when unnoticed. By the time the guidance counselor moved him into regular English, Calvin had started skipping many classes.

Teachers (Mr. Robin and Ms. French) suspected that he became involved with a gang over the year. In December when I asked him about new tattoo-like markings around his eyes, Calvin said "I can't tell you about it." Calvin was expelled for the last 50 days of school because he brought a knife to school in his backpack. He explained that the knife was for protection. Calvin's path from being a school-identified ninth grader with the literacy knowledge and skills for Honors English (according to at least one teacher who recommended that placement) to an expelled student was riddled with missed opportunities on the part of the institution and teachers. Struggling reader identification sent Calvin the message that he was "stupid" and caused him to be scheduled in low-track science, math, and history classes. Being placed in Honors English, which may have initially mitigated some of the effects of his low-track labels, ultimately overwhelmed Calvin when neither the reading teacher nor the English teacher found ways to support his motivation and effort. As Calvin navigated the consequences of struggling reader identification coupled with missed opportunities for supplementary reading support, his learning was constrained. He was pushed out of school contexts,

which may have contributed to stronger gang affiliations over time and ultimately to his expulsion for school. (In the second half of this chapter, I discuss the school's punitive behavior management policies and how they positioned struggling readers such as Calvin.)

The potential buffering effects of out-of-school talents. I presented detailed accounts of Calvin and Mark to closely analyze the ongoing consequences of struggling reader identification. Other focal participants navigated hurdles relating to struggling reader identification, and young people tended to become less socially and/or academically engaged as the year progressed. Notably, two struggling readers, Mark and Mai See, remained school-identified and hopeful about their futures. Mark's case showed that he became less academically engaged, but he still believed school should and could serve him well. Mai See remained both socially and academically engaged. Differentiating these two young people from the rest of the sample was the fact that they had publicly recognized talents outside of school, which may have helped sustained their self-confidence. Both Mark and Mai See were accomplished dancers in their communities (Mark in break dance and Mai See in Hmong dance). Other focal participants had equally developed but more solitary interests than Mark and Mai See. For example, Calvin reported playing video games 15 hours a day; Javier drew sketches; Evan skate boarded; Aziza read novels and wrote poetry; and Keisha spent time socially networking on digital media. These interests could have brought the young people into contact with others and/or afforded them positive recognition, but they tended to purse their hobbies alone. These youths also appeared to have more difficulty with the social and emotional ramifications of struggling reader identification than Mark and Mai See.

Overall, despite the school and district's efforts to support focal participants by providing supplemental reading instruction, young people's acquisition of deficit labels and interactions among low-track classes tended to diminish their engagement with school and reduce their opportunities to engage with effective literacy and content area instruction.

Secondary Scheduling Practices Related to Reading Intervention

Institutionalized processes for assessing reading proficiency were directly related to secondary scheduling practices. Being identified as a struggling reader necessarily meant being scheduled into an intervention class. District and school literacy initiatives and resources delimited the nature and number of reading classes available at Moore High. Once institutional processes tracked students into reading classes, students clustered with other 'intervention' students across content area classes. These low-track classes were situated in a complex and rigid comprehensive master schedule. Teachers and students had difficulty making scheduling changes (even for students' academic or social/emotional support), and so it was difficult to shift the institutional arrangements that organized and mediated students' daily learning experiences.

In this section I examine how two aspects of secondary scheduling practices, tracked classes and the complexity of the master schedule, informed Moore High's reading intervention efforts. Specifically, I discuss how students' and teachers' interactions among tracked classes situated in a complex and rigid master schedule mediated students' reading and contributed to the construction of struggling readers.

Tracked classes. Focal participants' reading classes were tracked on two dimensions: ability and engagement. Moreover, their placement in an intervention class

resulted in de facto tracking as struggling readers clustered across content area classes. These interconnected layers of tracking served as institutional contexts that mediated social and instructional interactions in classrooms and thus focal participants' literacy learning.

In terms of ability-tracking, reading classes ranged from 'low level' phonics and decoding classes to 'mid-level' Read 180 classes to 'high level' Applied Literacy classes, which were theoretically aligned with ninth grade English and social studies classes (although in practice, limited opportunities for collaboration between reading and content area teachers made the alignment weak to nonexistent). All of the focal participants took either Read 180 or Applied Literacy, and the decoding classes primarily served students with identified disabilities.

Sorting youth into "engaged" and "unengaged" classes. As Ms. Long described, behavior data also factored into struggling reader identification and intervention decisions, and although it was not officially recorded in the master schedule, reading classes were also tracked into "engaged" and "unengaged" categories, and teachers used these terms when discussing their classes. *Engaged* classes were for students who were, as Ms. Long explained, "quietly" experiencing reading difficulty but not exhibiting behavior problems, and *unengaged* classes were for students with a history of behavior problems. To support the latter group, Ms. Long explained that Moore High needed:

…a reading intervention that worked for kids who had difficulty…in the area of self-control. And that intervention that we identified was Ms. Knox's class. Ms. Knox is able to establish relationships with kids that other teachers are not successful (in establishing), and she is so focused on success for these kids and she is so focused on literacy acquisition and the relationships with these kids….I mean it's not something that you can package and sell…We just happen to have the good luck of having the right person at the right time.

Ms. Long, building administrators, and other reading teachers believed Ms. Knox had a unique teacher stance and skill set, which notably, could not be 'packaged and sold' or taught. She had the ability to build positive learning-focused relationships with students who, in other settings, were less engaged academically and socially and/or demonstrated acting-out behaviors. Other reading teachers did not feel they could effectively teach *unengaged* students, and Ms. French, for example, tried to transfer two students to Ms. Knox's class at the beginning of the year. Even Ms. Knox attested,

I personally really like naughty kids…(Kids who) want to do everything that I say, they kind of bug me because I feel like I didn't have to work to get (their) respect…The kids that I really end up enjoying like are almost exclusively like kids who are considered to be really bad.

The fact that Ms. Knox *was* the intervention for "bad kids" demonstrates the extent to which institutional contexts not only positioned some youth as unengaged struggling readers, but also positioned teachers and school officials as not sharing in the responsibility or accountability for supporting all young people.

Constructing a deficit discourse through tracking. Although in some statements, Ms. Long and Ms. Knox foregrounded young people instead of their perceived behavior problems, "kids who had difficulty…in the area of self-control" and "kids who are considered to be really bad," their language also reflected—and helped construct—Moore High's predominantly deficit discourse about reading. Using terms such as "these kids," "really bad readers," and "naughty" casted reading and behavior labels as intertwined and students' skills, identities, and temperaments as immutable. Similarly, the main descriptor for Ms. Knox's class, *unengaged*, suggested a more permanent state than *disengaged.* Despite their language (and unlike teachers who discussed struggling readers primarily as behavior problems), Ms. Knox and Ms. Long consistently expressed belief in the potential of all young people. Similar to Ms. Long's comment, they made repeated statements over the course of the year that building relationships, believing all students could be successful, and focusing on literacy were important for supporting all readers. However, their (and the program's) efforts to positively support young people were mediated—if not hindered—by identifying, labeling, and institutionally tracking young people into engaged and unengaged classes.

Tracking on multiple dimensions. Reading classes that were tracked by ability and engagement, among other classes targeted at specific populations (e.g., orchestra, band) contributed to de facto tracking at Moore High. Clusters of students who were similar on one or more dimensions (e.g., identified as struggling readers, experienced musicians) shared similar schedules. Mr. Robin, a history teacher, and Ms. Schmidt, a math teacher, independently described what they thought were the negative effects of de facto tracking. Ms. Schmidt explained,

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Like in my morning classes…it is very functional because there are a lot of

leaders…We've switched some students from the afternoon classes into the

morning classes and their behaviors just disappear because it's so out of the

ordinary of what's happening in the room…They can't act out or everyone else in

the room just looks at them like, 'Why is this happening? This is not what class

looks like.'…I think the classes need to be more balanced because the afternoon

class scores consistently lower on almost every test. I don't think it's necessarily

ability, I think it's everything else in the room that brings everybody else down.

This kind of de facto tracking, in addition to official tracking, helped create classes in

which skills and knowledge—what counted as proficient or struggling and who

demonstrated proficiency or struggle—appeared to vary. Moreover, tracking contributed

to the institutionalized labeling of students as struggling and/or unengaged. Thus reading

skills, identities and practices appeared not to derive solely from individual students but

instead were mediated—brought forward or constrained—by tracked contexts.

A complex and rigid master schedule. Tracking contributed to the rigidity and

fragmentation of Moore High's master schedule. As students were ability-grouped into

narrowly defined classes (e.g., honors English, remedial algebra)—and some students,

such as the focal participants, were scheduled into additional intervention classes offered

only at particular times of day—it resulted in a complex and rigid scheduling system.

Maintaining students' schedules despite unaddressed learning needs. This made

it particularly difficult for reading teachers to flexibly respond to students' literacy needs

by moving students among reading classes or out of reading intervention entirely. For

example, Mark, whose 1262 Lexile score was well above the ninth grade benchmark, was

scheduled into Read 180 even though he was likely not a candidate for reading intervention at all. Teachers considered two options: removing reading intervention from his schedule all together or moving Mark into Applied Literacy which was 'higher level' and more content-area-aligned than Read 180. Scheduling obstacles prevented both of these changes, and Mark remained in Read 180.

Similarly, teachers wanted to move Aziza, another focal participant who demonstrated consistently proficient reading in intervention classes and who read multiple books for fun every month, out of reading intervention in the fall, but Aziza had to wait until second semester because institutional practices prevented her from beginning a new class mid-semester. Consequently, observations showed that Aziza spent fall semester in Applied Literacy feeling bored and disengaged (e.g., resting her head on her desk, reading novels instead of participating in class activities, arguing with the teacher). Mark, on the other hand, enjoyed the success he experienced in Read 180 even though the program did not help him build disciplinary literacy knowledge or practices for the content area classes in which he continued to struggle.

Ms. Knox acknowledged the difficulty in moving students such as Mark and Aziza into other classes; she explained,

High school is such a difficult web anyway because the kids have so many classes. Trying to make a schedule change is just a monstrous undertaking and you just don't have the same kind of flexibility that you do in the earlier grades.

Nevertheless, teachers attempted to change students' schedules for social and academic reasons, but Ms. Knox said that administrators typically responded, "Well there's no class we can put him in."

Placing the onus on youth to integrate learning across fragmented schedules.

The rigidity of the master schedule contributed to its fragmentation. In tracked contexts, teachers designed classes for particular groups of students who were thought to have similar kinds of skills, knowledge, and motivation, and so classes were theoretically if not actually specialized. Thus reading intervention classes were meant to serve a fundamentally different purpose than ninth grade English Language Arts even though both classes focused on reading and writing. (Moore High's traditional scheduling practices, which allotted 55 minutes for discreet, content area coursework, also contributing to the fragmented nature of the schedule.) Tracking mandated and institutionalized differences between classes, which contributed to students' fragmented learning experiences. Indeed, focal participants reported that reading classes did not help them in other classes. For example, when asked if what he learned in reading class helped him read and understand texts in other courses, Evan responded,

> I mean, not really. I mean, we do a lot of these sheets and stuff, but I mean, it helps me think more about what I'm reading and why I'm reading it and the meaning of it and it helps me understand what I'm reading a lot more. But, at the same time, that's only the things that are already in (reading) class because if I'm out of that class and I'm learning something else, it doesn't really help that much.

Similarly, Javier explained the limited ways in which reading class seemed to help with reading in other courses. He said,

> I feel like I've learned a few words and stuff and I think I can read a little faster than I used to, but that's practically it.

By saying "a few" and "a little," Javier characterized the minimal contribution that reading class made to improving literacy skills in other classes. Moreover, Javier did not discuss any connection between learning or knowledge building between reading and other classes.

Like Evan and Javier, other focal participants (Aziza, Keisha, Janice, and Calvin) reported difficulty seeing the connection between their intervention classes and other classes, and teachers recognized that this disconnection was problematic. Ms. French and Ms. Knox reported that they wanted better alignment between reading and content area classes, but the complexity of the master schedule made it difficult for them to have common planning periods with content area teachers. Even with common planning time, however, teachers reported that collaboration was difficult with the heavy demands of their daily responsibilities. These factors along with Moore High's traditional 55-minute class schedule resulted in disjointed learning experiences as students moved from class to class and day to day with little institutional support to synthesize their learning.

Ms. Talbot sympathized with students' difficulty negotiating a fragmented schedule. She said,

> Have you heard of a job in the entire world where the expectations change every single hour of the day? And we do that to kids and then we don't understand why they're upset….but (students) don't know your rules or don't know your policies.

Indeed, teachers had varying expectations for among other things behavior, participation, assessment, and work completion, and in observations, focal participants sometimes had difficulty navigating shifting classroom norms.

Disrupted learning was not only an issue across class periods, but also within the same class across days and weeks. Mark reported,

What we learn today does not go with what we learned, like, yesterday. Today we'll learn something about something else and then she'll try and compare it with what we learned yesterday but we would get so confused.

The extent to which a student such as Mark experienced instruction as coherent was mediated by factors related to the teacher, the student, and the classroom, but institutional contexts—rigid tracking and scheduling practices—placed the onus on students to integrate learning across space and time.

 Students' and teachers' interactions with Moore High's complex and fragmented master schedule mediated literacy teaching and learning by limiting both the range of class options and the flexibility to move students among them. Moreover, despite teachers' and students' recognition that reading and content area classes did not align well, the complex master schedule complicated, indeed hindered, their efforts to meaningfully connect literacy learning experiences. Thus, institutional scheduling practices mediated young people's reading skills, practices, and identities.

School and District Literacy Initiatives

Moore High participated in multiple school and district literacy initiatives, which to varying degrees, informed how teachers and students engaged in literacy practices, what kinds of literacy skills and strategies were emphasized in instruction, and who was identified as a struggling reader. The myriad initiatives sought to offer support to teachers (e.g., professional development) and students (e.g., literacy instruction). Although the

initiatives sometimes overlapped, they also competed for limited instructional time and teachers' attention.

Common and divergent purposes among Moore High's literacy programs.

The various initiatives and programs included Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), Freshman Achieve (created by the school), district-monitored reading intervention programs, Moore High reading classes, and Response to Intervention (RTI). These initiatives varied in student audience, purpose, platform, and locus of control (see Table 6.1).

Table 6.1

Moore High Literacy Initiatives and Programs in 2012-2013

Literacy initiatives / programs	Student audience	Purpose	Platform	Locus of control
AVID	All students, but special attention to average achieving students with college-bound potential	Support school-wide content area literacy; support first time college-bound students	School-wide teacher professional development; one AVID class for specially identified students	Principal and AVID coordinator
Freshman Achieve	Half of all ninth graders	Support transition from middle school to high school; emphasis on literacy	Approximately half of ninth grade classes	Ninth grade teacher coordinator
District-monitored reading intervention programs	Students identified as struggling readers and students with identified disabilities	Remediate struggling readers; help readers get to 'grade level'	Four classes using explicitly district-monitored reading programs	District literacy department and special education department
Moore High reading classes	Students identified as struggling readers, particularly ninth graders	Remediate struggling readers; help readers get to 'grade level'	Twelve classes (16 including special-education-only reading classes)	Literacy coach with special education and ELL departments
Response to Intervention	All students, but special attention to those needing increasingly supportive interventions	Identify readers in need of increasing levels/tiers of intervention through recurring assessment	Content area literacy instruction in core classes (Tier 1); reading classes (Tier 2); special education and reading classes (Tier 3)	District special education department and literacy coach

Evident in the number of programs and their overlapping goals, Moore High aimed to support all students' literacy learning. Indeed, among administrators and teachers, there was a sense of urgency to improve reading scores because Moore High had the lowest scores in the district and country, which were made public by the State Department of Instruction's 'Report Card.' When the Report Card was released, the administration sent a letter home with students explaining the steps they were taking to improve literacy instruction and test scores. Among these steps were the initiatives outlined above.

Institutional literacy initiatives mediated youth reading by influencing the substance, quality, and discourse of classroom instruction. For example, whereas content area teachers who embraced AVID strategies taught students to "mark the text" as they read, reading teachers tended to speak in metacognitive terms and asked students to "record your thinking as you read." Students did not always make the connection between literacy strategies, skills, and knowledge learned under the umbrella of one initiative, and those learned in the context of a different initiative. In one example, Ms. French told students to "annotate" a text during a Read 180 activity. She asked them to underline important ideas and record their questions. After some initial confusion, one student realized, "Oh, you want us to mark the text!" As this exemplar shows, some students understood literacy practices as decontextualized strategies, such as "mark the text," instead of flexible, broadly applicable tools for meaningfully engaging with text. When literacy instruction stemmed from so many different institutionalized initiatives, it on one hand increased students' opportunities to participate in literacy learning, but on

the other, placed a burden on students to integrate literacy learning across teaching that was informed by multiple initiatives.

Response to Intervention and perpetuated deficit discourses. In the 2012-2013 school year, the administrators tasked the literacy coach, Ms. Long, with broadening their reading intervention program and implementing the Response to Intervention effort. Analysis showed that as RTI and other literacy programs converged, they perpetuated deficit discourses about reading and struggling readers.

These deficit discourses were evident during biweekly reading teacher meetings. Led by the literacy coach, the reading teachers discussed the school's various literacy programs. Specifically, they organized school-wide and class-level reading and writing assessments, aggregated and analyzed literacy assessment data, engaged in professional development, and organized literacy resources/materials for content area teachers.

Discourses associated with RTI efforts were particularly pervasive as Ms. Long and the reading teachers used RTI terms to describe their classes. For instance, Ms. French said, "I teach tier 2 classes." The notion of tiered classes comes from RTI's federal and state mandate requiring schools to offer increasing levels of reading support. During the 2012-2013 school year, Ms. Long with the reading teachers designed (or articulated how current programs complied with) the RTI program. The first level of reading intervention was literacy instruction in core content area classes, which was supported in part by AVID. If students experienced reading difficulty after participating in quality content area literacy instruction, then the reading classes comprised the second tier of support. If students continued to have difficulty, then at the third tier they were

evaluated for special education support, which afforded an individualized education plan and specialized reading classes.

As I described in the chapter introduction, RTI terms and behavior terms were conflated; Ms. Knox said, "I get the behaviors, you know, the Tier 2 and 3 students." Even though according to the model, all reading teachers theoretically taught "tier 2" students, the RTI terms took on particularly negative connotations and were used to describe intertwined reading and behavior problems. During the 2012-2013 school year, as the literacy coach assumed the interrelated responsibilities of implementing RTI and managing the reading intervention program, the discourse associated with RTI appeared to amplify deficit discourses already embedded in the struggling reader identification and intervention process.

Literacy programs and shifting priorities. Toward the end of the school year, the district announced that its literacy priorities would be shifting in the following 2013-2014 school year. Administrators asked that Ms. Long stop managing the Moore High reading classes and, instead, focus on enhancing literacy instruction in the content area classes. In reading team meetings, the literacy coach and reading teachers expressed concern that traction they had developed in the way of an organized reading intervention effort was going to be significantly disrupted.

According to some teachers, these simultaneous and shifting initiatives signaled ever-rotating district and school priorities. For example, Ms. Talbot said, "I don't mean to say anything bad about Moore High, but I think there's a lack of, like, general consensus about what the goal is." Similarly, Ms. French explained that in her more than fifteen-year tenure as a special education and reading teacher, she had seen the district embrace

and implement several different reading programs. She felt that as soon as teachers became effective teaching in a particular program, the district would purchase and introduce a new curriculum.

In summary, the following reading intervention dimensions of institutional contexts were particularly important in mediating focal participants' reading: struggling reader identification, secondary scheduling practices, and literacy initiatives. Among contexts that mandated the reading-related labeling of students and the tracking of classrooms, students' reading skills, identities, and practices tended to be interpreted in deficit ways. Despite some teachers' and students' efforts to resist deficit positioning, institutionalized discourses relating to reading focused on *intervention* thus rendering students' reading mainly as a problem to be remediated.

Behavior Management Dimensions of Institutional Contexts

As I discussed in Chapter 5, many teachers interpreted reading problems as stemming from or related to behavior problems, and analysis showed that teachers' and students' interactions among classroom contexts frequently positioned focal participants as behavior problems. The conflation of struggling reader and behavior labels happened among not only classroom contexts, but also institutional contexts. Moore High's institutional policies and practices for behavior management informed what counted as noncompliant behavior and who was positioned as insubordinate (a term used frequently in behavior reports) in classroom spaces. As focal participants navigated school and district-wide systems for discipline, seven out of eight received referrals, five were suspended, and two were expelled. To varying extents, these institutional actions caused youth to miss instruction, created official records of 'bad' behavior that followed young

people through high school, and labeled youth as behavior problems—all of which mediated their classroom learning and social identities. In this section, I examine the school's culture of compliance and school- and district-wide behavior policies and implementation.

School Culture of Compliance

Moore High School had an institutional culture in which compliance and order were highly valued. Administrators and teachers stressed among other things punctuality, respect, and conscientiousness in their conversations with young people. When students did not comply (or were perceived as not complying) with school and classroom rules, they experienced punitive consequences. High rates of disciplinary action—which were not uniform across all student groups—were evidence of Moore High's focus on behavior. (In the following subsection, I present data for trends in school- and district-wide disciplinary action.) In this section, I examine three elements that both reflected and helped to construct Moore High's compliance-oriented culture: rules-focused signs displayed throughout the school, ongoing surveillance by security personnel, and daily morning announcements reminding students to be responsible and respectful. Institutional contexts that prioritized order mediated classroom-based student-teacher interactions and struggling readers' literacy learning.

Hallway signs and an emphasis on order. Further illustrative of the school's order-driven culture were signs and posters displayed in non-classroom public spaces (e.g., school entrance ways, hallways). The first was a quote painted on the wall outside of the main office (see Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4. Quote Displayed Outside of Main Office
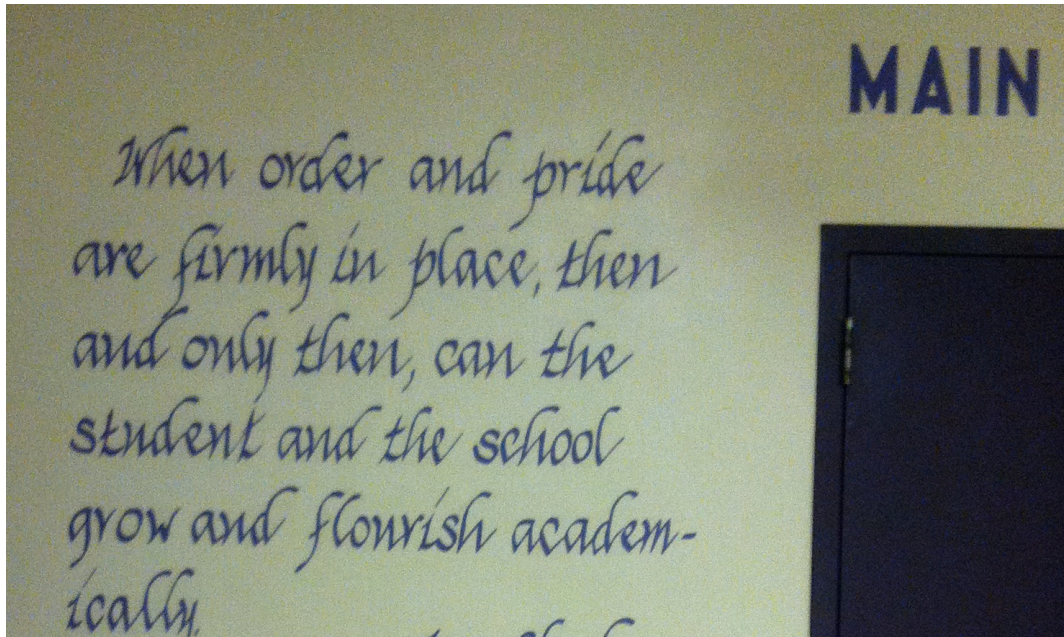
This quote came from Moore High's longest-serving principal, and its prominent display outside of the main office signals its institutional importance. The belief that order needed to be "firmly in place" in order for students to "flourish academically" was particularly evident among low-track classrooms in which compliance was a focus and teachers emphasized behavior support for struggling youth readers. (For a close examination of low-track classroom practices, see Chapter 5.).

In another example of the predominant tone of order and accountability, a bulletin board in a busy school hallway had the following hand-made sign (see Figure 6.5).

Figure 6.5. Bulletin Board in Main Hallway
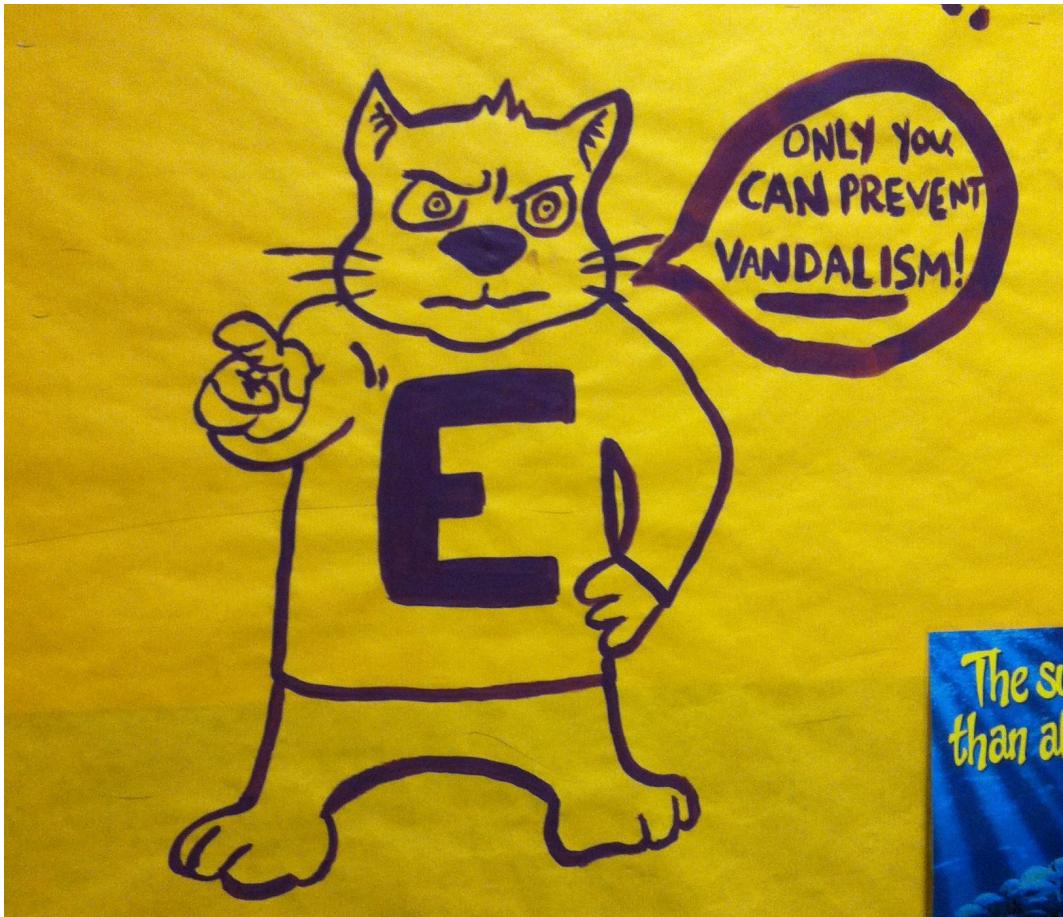
In the image, a scowling cat mascot waved his finger warningly and positioned the reader as responsible for—if not complicit in—any school vandalism that might occur. By suggesting that youth were accountable for their peers' non-compliant behavior, the sign went beyond simply communicating school rules (as the welcome sign did). It implied an increased burden on students to ensure school-wide order.

Another index of institutional norms was Moore High's welcome sign by the welcome center at the main entrance. The sign focused more on rules than on welcoming (see Figure 6.6). (To protect the anonymity of the school, I did not include the photograph of the welcome sign. Instead, I recreated it using the same relative font size, font style, and spacing.)

Figure 6.6. School Welcome Sign

Moore High School Welcome Center
We welcome you to Moore High School.

Please remove:

Head Gear/Hats   Cell Phones
Head Phones   Winter Coats
All guests please check-in. We're glad you're here!

In this sign, the largest font and the boldest words were dedicated to what students should remove upon entering the building. The sign functioned more as a compliance reminder and rule enforcer than a greeting. Notably, I observed teachers and administrators using cell phones and wearing coats, so they were not accountable to the same school rules as students. Instead of a democratic culture in which students and teachers collectively established norms, Moore High was a hierarchical culture in which administrators and teachers designed and implemented rules. The sign's message—both in terms of content and design—reflected the extent to which Moore High valued adherence to these rules.

Security personnel and ongoing surveillance. The welcome center itself signaled a controlled environment. During class time, Moore High doors were locked from the outside, and people (e.g., visitors, tardy students) could only enter after pressing a call button and being 'buzzed in' via a door to the welcome center. School policy required that visitors sign in and out. On most days, school security personnel were stationed in or near the welcome center. In addition, security personnel monitored the hallways during class time and passing periods, the cafeteria during lunch periods and after-school activities, and school entranceways at the beginning and end of the each day. Security personnel also responded to teachers' calls to the office about classroom

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behavior problems; in those instances, security personnel attempted to diffuse stressful interactions and escorted young people out of class. Communicating on two-way radios, security and administrators maintained ongoing observation of students' as they moved among school spaces. The effect was nearly uninterrupted compliance-related supervision.

Reminders to "be responsible" and the construction irresponsibility. In addition to seeing these kinds of visual reminders that behavior compliance, both one's own and others', were important, students heard auditory reminders. At the end of the daily morning announcements, the speaker (usually a student volunteer) signed off with a school slogan, "Be respectful. Be ready. Be responsible." Teachers used the words *respectful* and *responsible* in conversations with and about students and students' 'acting-out' behavior. For example, Ms. Talbot regularly bid goodbye to students at the end of a class period by saying, "Goodbye. Be responsible. Make good choices." The school slogan, the frequency with which it was articulated on a school-wide platform, and the ways that administrators and teachers adopted its language positioned students as tending towards irresponsible and disrespectful behaviors—and thus in need of reminders to act differently. Despite good intentions, administrators' and teachers' ongoing emphasis on responsibility contributed to the construction of a notion that students were irresponsible.

When taken together, the daily school announcements, the ongoing security presence, the locked building, and the rules-focused signs constructed and reflected a context through which behavioral compliance was essential not only for students' participation (i.e., being allowed to remain in class) but also for their learning. The belief that firm order begot academic growth was institutionalized at Moore High, and thus

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teachers were positioned to prioritize order in their classrooms. This institutional context necessarily mediated student-teacher interactions, and relatedly, focal participants' classroom-based social and learning experiences.

Behavior Policies and the Trends and Variability in Policy Implementation

Individual decisions made by teachers or administrators regarding disciplinary action—and young people's decisions about how and when (or when not) to engage in classroom learning—were not isolated events. Behavior management decisions were necessarily situated in and informed by a particular school culture as well as broader discipline trends across the school building and district. In this section, I examine how institutional behavior policies and their implementation mediated focal participants' engagement with school and their literacy learning opportunities.

Discipline trends. Interactions involving student behavior and disciplinary action were embedded in larger trends across Moore High classrooms and the district's schools.

Disciplining students: District and school disproportionalities. According to an official district report on behavior for 2012-2013, there were large district-wide disproportionalities between suspension and student demographic data. For example, low-income students made up 48% of the district's population but received 85% of suspensions. African Americans made up 19% of the district enrollment but received 60% of out-of-school suspensions. These district-wide patterns mediated how students and teachers interacted with and responded to one another regarding classroom rules and norms.

Disproportionate district-wide discipline trends were particularly pronounced at Moore High School, which had had the highest enrollment of low-income students and

youth of color in the district. Among district high schools, Moore High reported the highest number of out-of-school suspensions (584) and behavior referrals (2,109). The second highest rates reported by a different high school were respectively 391 and 1,631. Over the course of the year, 14% of Moore High's students were out-of-school suspended. These school-wide trends were problematic for focal participants among whom young people of color and low-income students were over-represented. For example, although the average referral per student was 1.38 at Moore High (again the highest among district high schools), it was 5.25 among struggling readers. In addition, focal participants missed a combined 119 days of instruction from being suspended and/or expelled.

Self-reinforcing cycle of suspension, missed instruction, and acting-out. The school's high rate of suspension spurred a problematic cycle according to Ms. Talbot who taught three of the eight focal participants. She said,

> Students act-out because they don't want to be embarrassed (when they are confused in class). Then we suspend them. Then they're gone, and then they come back and then they've missed two days of instruction and then they don't know what's going on.

Then, according to Ms. Talbot, when students did not know "what's going on," students acted-out again and were suspended again. The cycle was self-reinforcing. Rather than a punitive system, Ms. Talbot wished the school's "justice system…was a bit more restorative." Although she attempted to engage in restorative practices in her own classroom (e.g., asking students to reflect on their choices, engaging youth in conversations about responses stressful situations, handling matters in the classroom

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instead of calling security), she recognized the negative effect that institutional discipline approaches had on students' learning. Notably, Ms. Talbot, Mr. Henry, and Ms. Knox stood out among teacher participants in their restorative approaches to conflict management. The other five teachers in the sample, however, tended to engage in institutionally aligned punitive practices (e.g., sending students to in-school suspension during class time, calling security).

Disrupting punitive behavior practices. Various school leaders and teachers resisted institutional contexts for punitive behavior practices. In addition to three of the eight teachers in the sample, another group of ninth grade teachers and district leaders took steps to mitigate what the district acknowledged (in the 2012-2013 behavior report) were problematic discipline trends.

One such effort was Positive Behavior Support (PBS), a key initiative among the district's "Strategic Plan Priorities." A district website explained that PBS was

> …a framework for behavior support and intervention…(and) a research-based school-wide approach to teach and support positive behavior using the Response to Intervention framework.

Despite an apparent focus on positive behavior, the model was construed by an institutional discourse that framed (negative) behavior as requiring intervention. The deficit discourse inherent in RTI failed to align with—and perhaps even undermined— PBS's articulated goals to "increase students' social and emotional capacities" and "improve student to student and student to staff relationships." PBS gained little traction at Moore High. In discussions of school wide behavior management during the yearlong study, only one teacher (Ms. Knox) mentioned PBS.

In another effort to disrupt punitive practices, one group of ninth grade teachers, attempted to implement a positive behavior rewards system (different from PBS) among the Freshman Achieve classes. They devised a card system whereby teachers opportunistically gave students' green cards to praise positive academic or social contributions, yellow cards to issue warnings that behavior was going off-task, and red cards to send students to in-school suspension. Students were invited to put their green cards into a prize drawing at the end of every week. Teachers implemented the system in February, and in classroom observations from February to June, I never saw a focal participant receive a green card. Thus even among institutional contexts that sought to promote positive learning-focused behavior, by not being acknowledged for their productive contributions at the same time that their peers were, struggling youth readers continued to be positioned in deficit ways.

An illustrative case: Ms. Knox and complex approaches to behavior management and relationship building. As I discussed in Chapter 5, the reading department designated Ms. Knox as "the intervention" for "unengaged" readers with behavior problems. Despite the problems inherent in positioning youth as "behavior problems" and tracking young people into "unengaged" classes, Ms. Knox was indeed highly skilled at building relationships with young people in her classes. I next closely examine Ms. Knox's intertwined approaches to building relationships, teaching, and managing behavior. Her case illustrates the complexity teachers negotiated as they participated in institutional contexts for behavior management and reading intervention while interacting with struggling readers who have histories of being positioned (and positioning themselves) as "behavior problems." The following exemplars of Ms. Knox's

learning-focused approaches to mediating behavior problems were representative of Mr.

Henry's and Ms. Talbot's approaches, but these teachers differed from the other five

teachers in the sample who tended to emphasize rule-following. Correspondingly, as I

have discussed, struggling readers were more engaged and successful in these three

classes than in others. Close analysis of Ms. Knox's case affords an examination of how a

teacher challenged institutional contexts for behavior management in ways that benefitted

struggling readers.

Challenging institutionalized positive behavior management. As I discussed in

Chapter 5, Ms. Knox fostered positive classroom contexts in which she respected young

people and effectively encouraged them to engage in literacy learning. Despite her

emphasis on positive and constructive student-teacher interactions, she discussed what

she perceived to be the limitations of positive behavior approaches for adolescents. Ms.

Knox said,

> I think it's a crock to be talking about positive behaviors towards the high school
>
> level… it's too complicated and frankly like the high school kids aren't really that
>
> motivated by like snacks and prizes…For some kids it really works and then for
>
> other kids—and those are probably going to be your kids that cause the most
>
> problems—it just is not effective.

In this instance Ms. Knox underscored that different behavior approaches worked for

different youth, and she challenged an institutional notion that positive behavior

programs worked for particularly disengaged youth.

Despite her critique, Ms. Knox used a version of a positive reward system in her

classroom (i.e., awarding points for positive contributions with the collective goal of a

class pizza party). My analysis suggested, however, that rather than her points system, it was Ms. Knox's emphasis on building meaningful, learning-focused relationships with young people that supported youth learning and social development. The ways that Ms. Knox deliberately positioned youth as capable learners proved to be atypical classroom positioning for her students—those identified as having histories of disengaged and/or acting-out behaviors—including focal participants, Evan and Javier.

Building relationships and supporting learning identities. Evidence that Ms. Knox's perspective on and treatment of 'behavior' students was unusual is the following student-teacher exchange. Ms. Knox reported this conversation with a struggling reader, and it was representative of interactions I observed in her classroom.

> I was trying to get (students) to take their…SRI tests, and you know I like to get them pumped up… "You're going to do great, like you made so much progress. You're ready…you're really smart." And (the student) was like, "Miss Knox, you just stop saying that." I'm like, "You know it's true…you're a really smart guy." And (the student said), "You're the only teacher here that thinks that."

Ms. Knox praised the student's growth and intelligence, which appeared to surprise or perhaps even unnerve the young person who was not accustomed to such messages (or positioning) from teachers. In another account, Ms. Knox reported that a different student "wrote on her literacy history that it made her feel like less of a person when she can't read words in class." These exemplars illustrate a pattern evident among interviews, student work samples, and field notes in which struggling readers expressed feeling bad about themselves not just as readers, but also as learners and young people. Thus Ms. Knox's confidence in students as learners was a notable change among institutional

contexts that positioned struggling readers as behavior problems through among other things punitive practices, suspensions, and missed instruction.

Dealing with off-task behavior in positive classroom contexts. In the midst of a learning-focused classroom climate and positive relationships (interacting among institutional contexts for punitive behavior management), students still demonstrated problematic behaviors. In those instances Ms. Knox tried to keep class interactions focused on reading and writing instead of drawing attention to the acting-out behavior. If off-task behaviors persisted or escalated, Ms. Knox approached students individually. She explained that helping students "save face" by inconspicuously asking what was wrong was more effective than reprimanding youth publicly. In observations, Mr. Henry and Ms. Talbot also tended to approach youth individually and quietly rather than 'call them out' during whole-group instruction.

As I discussed in Chapter 5, when Ms. Knox was able to identify reasons for disengaged or noncompliant behavior as in the case of Evan's listlessness and low attendance due to homelessness, she took steps to support students. However, when she could not identify a reason, she assumed positive intent on the part of youth. For instance, she told me that she gave students "three passes" every quarter, three days or times when they could be in a "terrible mood" and opt out of work. She wanted to "give them that space to have a bad day without being kicked out of class."

Even while Ms. Knox's approach countered institutional practices for behavior management, she used deficit terms like "naughty" and "behaviors" when discussing students. Thus at the same time that she built up youth, to some extent Ms. Knox also helped construct and maintain institutional deficit discourses that conflated behavior and

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reading struggle. Examining Ms. Knox's case illustrates how teachers complexly navigated the realities of secondary contexts.

Conclusion. In the section on discipline trends, I demonstrated patterns in disciplinary action across the district and school, documented disproportionately high rates of discipline among different student groups including struggling readers, and documented efforts to resist and change punitive practices. In addition, I showed that although struggling youth engaged in restorative behavior management in Ms. Knox's, Mr. Henry's, and Ms. Talbot's classes, focal participants received disproportionately high behavior referrals, suspensions, and expulsions. To understand how and why struggling readers received so many referrals and missed so much instruction—and to understand how and why they were positioned as behavior problems—required an examination of not only the practices enacted among individual classrooms (which I did extensively in Chapter 5) but also the school and district contexts that mediated behavior management decisions.

I next turn to the variability in behavior management and show how in the midst of broad trends, administrators' and teachers' disciplinary actions were both frequent and unpredictable. When behavioral consequences manifested in variable if not idiosyncratic ways, knowing how to participate in institutional contexts was at times difficult and stressful for both teachers and students. For young people in particular, navigating shifting norms for what was acceptable and unacceptable behavior resulted in further behavior problem positioning.

Discipline variability. In a compliance-focused culture, administrators, teachers, and students devoted a considerable amount of time to discussing, documenting, and

'managing' students' behavior as evidenced by analyses of the district behavior report, classroom observations, and participant interviews. What this attention to behavior meant for young people, however, varied among students. As I documented, students from particular demographic groups experienced disproportionately high or low rates of disciplinary action, but even among students who were regularly disciplined, punishments were doled out in idiosyncratic ways. The same behaviors might warrant different consequences on different days or with different teachers and administrators. This contributed to a sense of uncertainty and injustice and among struggling readers who were regularly positioned as behavior problems. In this section, I demonstrate these ever-shifting institutional contexts for behavior management and how they mediated youths' and teachers' interactions relating to engaged and noncompliant behavior.

Negotiating inconsistent expectations and consequences: Positioning youth.

What resulted in suspension one day might not the next day. Ms. Knox framed the issue in this way: "You catch the principal on a good day and you're fine." Not only were administrators inconsistent in their behavior policy implementation, different teachers took up policies in different ways. Ms. Knox explained that "some teachers are so reactive and take (students' behavior) so personally," and with a different teacher, "the same behavior is completely diffused and handled in a different way in another space." Mr. Henry made a similar point; whereas he rarely asked students to leave class unless it was "an extreme situation," some teachers are "not even trying to work with a student you know, they just send them out." Like Mr. Henry, Ms. Knox and Ms. Talbot reported that they tried to handle conflicts in class, avoid asking students to leave, and avoid calling security to escort students out of class. In one school year of observations, I saw

Ms. Talbot and Ms. Knox each call security one time, and Mr. Henry never called security. As points of comparison, I observed both Mr. Robin and Ms. Malloy call security personnel to escort students to suspension 1-3 times per month. Across classrooms, variable use of security and in-school suspension created an unpredictable atmosphere in which youths' behaviors were constructed differently and resulted in different consequences across different spaces and times. Moreover, when teachers used security and in-school suspension as behavior management tools, youths missed instruction and conflict escalated.

Even when teachers kept students in class to address behavior problems, teachers' approaches (and positioning of students as behavior problems) varied. As I discussed in Chapter 5 with regard to classroom behavior management, Keisha experienced variability in her interactions with different teachers (Mr. Henry, Mr. Robin, and Ms. French). Among different classroom contexts, teachers responded differently to Keisha and her cell phone use (ignoring it, taking the phone away, asking her to leave class), and correspondingly, Keisha interactions varied among classes (using her phone more or less often, turning over her phone without argument, refusing to give her phone).

In another example of inconsistent behavior management, Ms. Knox reported an incident in which a struggling reader was suspended for an "excessive" amount of time:

> (The student) had only two referrals and recently was suspended for a day and half for swearing at a teacher, which to me seems excessive…And then I see other kids who have got fifteen referrals for the same thing and haven't been suspended a day. You know it just seems very inconsistent.

From Ms. Knox's perspective, students' shifting and unpredictable interactions with institutional contexts for behavior management caused confusion. She explained,

> Students don't know what's going to happen…if they knew…'If I curse this teacher out right now, I'm definitely going to get suspended for a day, or there's definitely going to be this consequence,' then I think they'd be able to think about (their choices) more…

Mr. Henry echoed Ms. Knox's point when he explained that having a "consistent expectation (for) consistent behavior" was important for students' learning. Regarding Keisha, Mr. Henry explained,

> She always knows exactly what's going to happen when she comes in here with me. She knows how I'm going to treat her.

Amidst institutional practices for disciplining students frequently and unpredictably, when teachers maintained consistent expectations coupled with respectful attitudes towards all students, struggling readers remained engaged as learners.

> ***Wrestling with behavior management policies: Positioning teachers.*** As teachers and administrators decided when to enforce what rules and with whom, they wrestled with institutional policies for behavior management. Mr. Robin said, "It's not like I want to kick kids out." Similarly, according to Mr. Henry, the ninth grade dean of students, Mr. Lind, who was responsible for discipline issues, said,

> I hate having to suspend a kid when they do a certain violation, I don't have a choice, I have to…but I hate it, because I know that at the end of the day I'm just making it worse for them (not) better.

Mr. Lind, who in his capacity as administrator represented the school and, to some extent, determined its approach to behavior management, felt beholden to institutional policies even though they made it "worse" for students. According to Mr. Henry, administrators such as Mr. Lind dealt with "the whole political aspect, like what the teacher expects" in terms of administrative support with behavior issues. Thus, both teachers' expectations and school-wide policies mediated administrators' authority to manage discipline issues. In this regard, institutional contexts were not unilaterally more powerful than classroom contexts; rather actors simultaneously navigated and constructed multiple contexts for behavior management.

Conclusion. In summary, students, teachers, and administrators navigated and constructed a school culture of compliance in which disciplinary actions were both frequent and unpredictable. In the midst of variable, if not idiosyncratic, behavior management decisions, Moore High played host to high rates of disciplinary actions that differentially affected different student groups. In this environment, focal participants negotiated institutionalized consequences for their (perceived) behavior problems. As I have demonstrated, these consequences tended to result in missed instruction and behavior problem positioning across classrooms, which in turn negatively mediated students' opportunities to engage in literacy and content area learning. In classroom contexts that resisted these institutional norms and practices, struggling readers participated as engaged and valued class members and improving learners.

Conclusion

In different school spaces and times, I found that participants' interactions with institutional contexts mediated young people's reading skills, practices, and identities and

thus the extent to which they demonstrated reading proficiency and struggle. Intertwining processes for reading intervention and compliance-oriented behavior management promoted not only the conflation of reading and behavior problems, but also institutionalized deficit discourses for reading and behavior. Despite the fact that school- and district-wide reading intervention and positive behavior efforts were intended to support young people, these contexts had unintended negative consequences. Indeed, focal participants' experiences among these contexts tended to impede students' literacy learning and social/emotional growth. As I have shown, some teachers and students resisted institutional arrangements and processes that hindered young people (e.g., Mark considered enrolling in another high school; Ms. French abandoned the district reading program; and Ms. Knox resisted calling security into her classroom.). Despite difficult odds, at times participants productively navigated institutional contexts for reading intervention and behavior management.

On balance, however, the deficit discourses and institutional authority both constituting and imbuing these contexts tended to diminish focal participants' literacy learning opportunities and position them problematically across school contexts. To further warrant that claim and to conclude, I present one final particularly illustrative exemplar involving Mark and his math teacher, Ms. Malloy. In this brief exemplar, I synthesize new and previously presented data to ultimately summarize the purpose of this chapter.

In an interview in November, Mark and I were discussing his math class, which was low-track, physically crowded, and the final period of the day. In an attempt to balance teacher allocation, the class had been transferred from one teacher to another

after the first month of school, a move that neither the teacher, Ms. Malloy, nor students reported wanting or liking. As I have documented, in observations, acting-out behaviors and negative student-teacher interactions frequently disrupted teaching and learning; in one class period, Ms. Malloy reprimanded or redirected individual students 59 times. During every observation, Ms. Malloy asked a student or students to leave the room for not following class rules, and on two occasions an administrator stood in the back of the room to apparently help keep the class focused. As I noted earlier, Mark described the class as "dark," and Ms. Malloy described it as her "single worst…(in) sixteen years." She said Mark had a "very very negative attitude." In this instance, institutional processes and arrangements mediated classroom contexts in ways that made the class difficult for both the teacher and Mark (i.e., low-track, crowded, last hour of the day, change in teachers).

When I asked Mark "if his voice or perspective mattered in math class," he said, "No." Next I asked if his voice mattered in any of his classes, and he said, "No, not really." That Mark felt unheard or undervalued was not limited to one set of instructional or social contexts in one classroom; it was a problem institutional in scope.

Evan responded similarly about his math class in which, as I have discussed, the teacher interpreted and positioned Evan as apathetic. When I asked Evan if his voice or perspective mattered in math class, he said,

Not really because…the reason that I say that is because that's not my best subject I think. It's kind of more difficult sometimes. I feel like my voice doesn't matter because it's other people's that are more eligible to matter. Other people probably aren't as interested in what I do in that class.

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Evan thought that other students were "more eligible to matter" because they were better at learning mathematics than he was. Institutional and classroom contexts had positioned Evan to internalize a notion that the inherent value of his perspective hinged on his ability to demonstrate proficiency. In contexts where a student's voice is only as valuable as his ability to know the 'right answer' or be a 'good' student, struggling readers are not only stifled academically, but also discouraged from participating as valued members of classroom and school communities.

Some teachers resisted constraining institutional processes for reading intervention and behavior management. In these teachers' classes, students reported that their voices and perspectives mattered. For example, in the following exchange, Aziza explained how she knew her perspective as an African and Muslim mattered in Ms. Talbot's history class.

Julie: Do you think in this class that your voice or your perspective matters?

Aziza: Because—there's basically—it's US History, is basically talking about our voices matter. And, I think that now, like in 2013, it matters most. I mean, in this class and outside the class too.

Julie: Are there things about this class in particular that make you feel like you and your perspective matters?

Aziza: Yeah, like—when we have debates, or when we get on certain topics that would relate to me, and that's when it matters most. There are stereotypes that you could bring up and I'm going to have to like, get rid of those. Like, African stereotypes that all Africans click when they're trying to

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communicate, that's only south Africa, not west. So, when they get on

Islam, and they be like, all Muslims are terrorists, I'm not a terrorist.

Julie: And you identify as Muslim. Yes. So, when things that—so, when you get

to share your perspective about your identity in this class, you know that

your voice matters?

Aziza: Yeah.

Ms. Talbot invited young people's to bring their perspectives to bear on discussions about

history. Moreover, she taught students how to respectfully debate issues. With students

she created a safe classroom climate in which youth engaged in knowledge-building

conversations that drew on history and students' personal experiences. Ms. Talbot also

communicated that students' perspectives mattered by giving them positive feedback.

When asked if her perspective mattered in history class, Mai See said, "Yeah…she said

I'm a good hard worker." Being a hard worker was central to Mai See's academic

identity. When Ms. Talbot complimented her for working hard, Mai See felt valued.

Understanding when struggling readers felt valued as people and learners—particularly

because they tended to report that their voices did not matter in classrooms—and what

feeling valued meant for their learning is an important contribution of this work, which I

discuss in the next chapter.

The overarching purpose of this chapter was to closely examine the institutional

arrangements, processes, and systems by which focal participants came to be identified

and habitually positioned as struggling youth readers at Moore High. Improving their or

any struggling youth readers' literacy learning cannot be an endeavor circumscribed to

bolstering instruction or fostering trusting student-teacher relationships—although both

are critical. Rather, my analysis implies that deepening literacy learning for all young

people requires an examination, indeed reconfiguration, of institutional contexts for

reading intervention and behavior management. In the next chapter, I further discuss the

study's implications for the reorganization of secondary schools and their reading

programs.

CHAPTER VII

Conclusions and Implications

Introduction

Throughout my dissertation I have returned to Keisha as a touchstone. Her case serves as a thread through a complex discussion about the relationship between school contexts and struggling readers. In addition, Keisha's case is representative of the fact that all focal participants demonstrated more and less proficient reading across space and time, which problematizes a static notion of reading struggle or skill.

Close analysis of Keisha's case illustrates the myriad roles that school contexts can play in mediating youths' reading. As I have shown, Keisha's identification as a struggling reader had cascading consequences including, among other things, placement in a reading intervention class, the assignment of a deficit label, consignment to a low-track schedule, and a tendency to be positioned as a behavior problem and poor learner. Yet when Keisha participated in (and helped construct) productive contexts for disciplinary literacy learning, which manifested in Algebra more often than in other classes, she demonstrated improving or proficient reading-related skills and practices and enacted positive learning identities. That Keisha's demonstrations of difficulty and proficiency varied across classroom spaces challenges the notion that struggling secondary readers have uniformly low skills or disengaged attitudes. Therefore, static

assessments (e.g., grade-level-equivalent reading levels, Lexile scores), which are used for reader identification and progress monitoring, present an extremely limited picture of what youth readers know and can do. A productive route to improved secondary literacy is to examine when, how, and why contexts tend to support students as readers and young people and to use those findings to inform literacy theory, policy, and teacher education.

The trajectories of youth in this study are telling and offer a cautionary tale about the consequences of well-intended literacy policies, curricula, and pedagogies. Beginning on the first day of school, youth were positioned in deficit ways. By the end of the year only four of the eight focal participants were attending school. As I discussed in earlier chapters, struggling readers reported feeling demoralized ("less of a person"), a sense of injustice ("it's not fair."), and unintelligent ("slow"). A pattern evident among interviews, student work samples, and field notes showed that struggling readers felt bad about themselves not just as readers, but also as learners and young people.

My analysis demonstrates that it was not instances of reading difficulty that compromised youths' self-perceptions. Indeed, in spaces where teachers actively positioned youth as able to learn, struggling readers grappled with complex texts and remained engaged even when it was difficult, thus co-constructing positive literacy learning contexts. For example, as I discussed in Chapter 5, Aziza read, re-read, and annotated primary source documents in U.S. History in order to participate in small and large group discussions about American imperialism. Keisha and Javier collaborated with peers to read and understand different representations of linear functions in Algebra. Indeed, every one of the eight focal participants demonstrated either growth or proficiency in reading during my time with them, but they only demonstrated these

positive reading skills in contexts that supported them as young people with potential to grow and learn. Although this may seem like an obvious conclusion, what is powerful about this finding is that all the teachers in the school believed they were engaged in practices that supported students' learning. Furthermore, institutional policies and practices constrained the work of all the teachers. This research thus raises the question of how to help teachers and administrators work with students to construct contexts that support student learning.

How young people's reading skills and practices, as well as corresponding behaviors and attitudes, were framed across different contexts positioned young people as either struggling or successful. Despite some productive classroom spaces, youth tended to experience and participate in limiting contexts for literacy learning. When struggling reader identification and intervention comes at such a cost, it undermines not only literacy learning, but also young people's opportunities to participate as valued members of school communities. This study helps make transparent how all school actors complexly constructed and interacted among well-intended institutional processes and policies in ways that contributed to the construction of youth as 'struggling readers.' The findings thereby help make possible the reorganization of secondary literacy programs in the interest of all learners. In what follows, I articulate the study's main findings, contributions to theory and research, and implications for schools, teacher education, research, and policy.

Main Findings

As I shadowed struggling readers for one school year, I observed their reading-related skills, identities, and practices vary by space, time, and relationships. These

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varying demonstrations of reading proficiency and difficulty occurred through interactions with others. Interactions were constitutive and reflective of not only the social and instructional contexts of students' classrooms, but also the institutional contexts of their school and district. Young people participated in shaping contexts, but as I have argued, they had less authority than teachers and administrators to fundamentally shift school processes and systems, particularly those contexts through which young people were positioned as deficit readers or as, in the words of some school personnel, "behaviors." Overall, I found that students', teachers', and administrators' interactions with particular school contexts were especially important in not only identifying reading difficulty but also constructing 'struggling readers.' Specifically, my analyses led to three interrelated, main findings.

First, teachers and young people mutually built contexts, but the consequences of that co-construction had differential impact on teachers and students. My analyses showed not only how contexts were dynamically co-constructed, but also how actors' histories of participation in school spaces were powerful. Teachers and youth brought different histories of participation into classrooms, which mediated how they interacted in particular spaces, times, and relationships. Teachers had authority to follow through on their interactions in ways that could support or compromise students' opportunities to learn. For instance, teachers had authority to penalize students, to remove young people from class, to assign deficit labels, or to engage in some other positioning behavior. Students could resist teachers' positioning, but in general, I found that students' assertive actions or responses did not have the same long-term consequences as teachers' actions. Thus one key finding of this work is that in the interest of underscoring the dynamic, co-

constructed nature of contexts, educators and researchers do not lose sight of the power of histories of participation.

In addition, I found that as students moved across classroom spaces, their interactions among social contexts (e.g., student-teacher interactions) and instructional contexts (e.g., disciplinary literacy instruction) mediated students' reading proficiency and difficulty. When youth experienced disciplinary literacy instruction embedded in trusting, respectful, and caring relationships, young people tended to: (a) express positive feelings about themselves, their teachers, and their class contexts, (b) engage as motivated and agentic learners/readers, and (c) demonstrate proficient or improving reading-related skills and practices. These findings suggest that trusting relationships interact with and support quality disciplinary literacy instruction to support adolescent readers in powerful ways.

Finally, classroom-based relationships and learning were influenced by factors beyond classroom walls. Analysis showed that actors' participation across institutional processes and arrangements mediated classroom-based instruction and social interactions. Specifically, as students, teachers, and other school personnel interacted in (and constructed) institutional contexts relating to reading intervention (e.g., tracking into "engaged" and "unengaged" reading classes) and compliance-oriented behavior management approaches (e.g., punitive disciplinary action), students were positioned as particular kinds of readers and young people. Although actors did not build a strict hierarchy of school contexts ranging from classroom to institutional, authority to position young people as deficient readers or 'behavior problems' was weighted toward school officials who were supported by institutional school policies.

Overall, findings indicate that actors' participation among classroom and institutional contexts complexly mediated—and in some cases bolstered and/or hindered—youth literacy learning and identities. Therefore, stressing instruction as the sole, or perhaps even primary, means of support for struggling adolescent readers does not fully address the problem of secondary reading difficulty or behavior positioning. To effectively facilitate literacy learning for all young people, it is necessary to also consider the district- and school-wide practices through which administrators and teachers identify reading difficulty, structure school schedules, implement behavior policies, and build relationships with young people. Equally important is to consider how young people participate in maintaining and/or resisting these system-wide practices.

Institutional practices do not exist apart from the individuals whose interactions, interpretations, and decisions constitute those practices. That said, analysis of networks of interactions over time, or contexts, affords a different perspective than analysis of one person's action, intention, or decision. Therefore, to critique institutional practices and arrangements is not necessarily the same thing as critiquing the people who enact and benefit from those practices and arrangements. Indeed, Moore High teachers and administrators wanted young people to learn. (Four of the eight teacher participants in addition to the school literacy coach discussed the importance of supporting students' motivation, confidence, and academic identities, and all the teachers spoke (at least in general terms) about wanting students to learn content area skills and knowledge.) School leaders sought to help youth become successful students through the secondary reading program, which aligned with a Response to Intervention model and is typical among comprehensive high school reading programs. In the midst of well-meaning and seasoned

practitioners, who in some cases implemented evidence-based programs (e.g., Read 180), focal participants reported (and I observed) limiting literacy instruction and strained social experiences. To stave off blaming teachers or students for hectic classrooms or unproductive literacy learning, it is helpful to examine the networks of interactions that constitute institutional contexts and mediate teachers' instruction.

Because analyses showed that how participants navigated and built school contexts tended to constrain focal participants' reading, learning, and social well being, I closely examined those interactions in order to understand how teachers might work with students to reconstruct contexts. When focal participants thrived, I documented how actors constructed those contexts (and resisted constraining contexts) to facilitate students' growth as literate beings. Throughout my analyses, I tended to focus on teachers and systems-wide processes because they were, by virtue of their roles and positions, imbued with authority—the authority that is necessary to involve students in the reconstruction of school contexts. Students' perceptions and experiences significantly shaped my analysis, even if they were not the focus, because young people participated with agency across school spaces even when they did not have the authority to fundamentally manipulate institutional circumstances. In summary, to help point the way for positive changes in secondary schools, I analyzed when and why students enacted— and were interpreted as demonstrating—productive and struggling reading skills, identities, and practices.

Extending Theory and Empirical Research

The study extends theory and research in several areas: the interrogation of struggling reader labels, the role of context in adolescent literacy research, and the roles

of power and authority in the co-construction of contexts. In the following sections I articulate the study's theoretical and empirical contributions, and then in the implications section I discuss what these contributions mean for schools, research, and policy.

The Interrogation of Struggling Reader Labels

Efforts to problematize, if not abandon, struggling reader (and writer) labels have a long history (e.g., Brown, Palincsar, & Purcell, 1986; Dutro, Selland, & Bien, 2013; Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Franzak, 2006; Ivey, 1999). Scholars have argued that the reification and acquisition of deficit labels undermine youths' literacy learning (Alvermann, 2001). These labels propel the construction of not only deficit identities, but also culturally situated categories of *able* and *disabled* (or *proficient* and *deficient)* that demand the classification of students (Mehan, 1996). To counter the negative effects of labeling and to reframe reading difficulty, researchers have recommended a host of other labels/modifiers (e.g., striving, improving, inexperienced). Still, deficit labels persist.

My analysis showed that deficit labels—and their hindering consequences— persisted in part because the school's reading program was construed by a "discourse of remediation" (Gutiérrez et al., 2009, p. 225). More than just assignment of deficit labels, a discourse of remediation permeated, indeed constructed, many of Moore High's reading support efforts, including reading class names (e.g., engaged, unengaged, Tier 2, Tier 3), screening/assessment for reading problems (and progress), remedial reading curricula, and district literacy initiatives. According to Gutiérrez and colleagues, a pervasive focus on remediation, and I would add *intervention*, inherently positions young people as lacking and in need of intervening treatment in order to be 'remedied' or 'cured.' Students particularly "from nondominant communities have been socialized to and

through their participation in remedial courses, in which they develop unproductive and weak strategies for literacy learning" (Gutiérrez et al., 2009, p. 225). My findings support these claims by showing that struggling readers systematically participated in low-track classes and experienced disproportionately high rates of behavior referrals and suspensions, all of which contributed to compromised literacy learning opportunities.

Echoing Gutiérrez and colleagues' call for a shift away from remediating within-student problems, I argue that moving from approaches that seek to 'cure' the reader to approaches that bolster mediating factors in the learning environment (including how teachers and students interact among those factors) will contribute to improved literacy learning. This study helps make such a shift possible by providing a systematic, close analysis of the mechanisms by which students' participation in remedial or low-track courses led to unproductive literacy learning and negative behavior positioning. In demonstrating not only the limiting influence of deficit labels, but also how actors' participation among institutional arrangements constructed and maintained deficit reading categories, this study helps provide the knowledge necessary for dismantling constraining systems-wide processes and rebuilding productive school contexts for literacy learning.

The Role of Context in Adolescent Literacy Research

Adolescent literacy research has contributed to our understanding of the relationship between contexts and youths' literacy learning. Studies of out-of-school contexts found that young people enacted sophisticated literacy practices in home and community settings (e.g., Alvermann et al., 2007; Black, 2006; Leander & Lovvorn, 2006; Mahiri, 2004; Moje, 2000). Studies of youth in school, though relatively few in number, have shown the important role that school contexts played in young people's

literacy learning. In the school-based studies, researchers examined how the following dimensions of classroom contexts mediated literacy: culturally responsive social organization (Dillon, 1998), instructional activities (Hinchman & Zalewski, 1996), content area and text choice (Ivey, 1999), teacher-student relationships (Moje, 1996), knowledge and discourse (Moje et al., 2004), social identification and peer group (Wortham, 2006), and text circulation (Leander & Lovvorn, 2006).

Taken in concert, these findings provided a foundation for my examination of school contexts (see Chapter 1, Table 1.1, *Possible Key Dimensions of Reading Context,* p. 10). In addition, I used previous research to inform the design of initial instruments. For example, I expected students' and teachers' interactions relating to content area (Ivey, 1999), teacher-student relationships (Moje, 1996), and texts (Leander & Lovvorn, 2006) to be important dimensions of context for youth reading. I included these contexts (as well as other contexts that I identified during my ethnographic data collection phase) in my early observation and interview protocols (see Chapter 2, Table 3.5, *Observation Protocol from January 2013,* pp. 66).

My dissertation study extends adolescent literacy research by identifying and investigating several dimensions of classroom contexts simultatneously and how they interacted with each other and with readers to mediate enactments of reading skill, practice, and identity. In addition, I found empirical evidence for contexts that I had not seen closely examined in adolescent literacy research including, such as students' and teachers' interactions with behavior management policies, de facto tracking, rotating literacy initiatives, and physiological hardships.

Furthermore, by specifically tracing how institutional contexts (e.g., school- and district- wide processes) mediated classroom instruction and student positioning, my findings problematize notions of "classroom contexts" as bound containers. The findings suggest that examining (and disrupting) institutional processes and arrangements through which struggling readers are positioned—and constructed—is critical to improving classroom-based learning and relationships.

This study also provides empirical evidence for teachers' and administrators' conflated perceptions of behavior problems and reading difficulty. For example, when asked why struggling readers had difficulty with reading and content area learning, teachers attributed difficulty to poor behavior, low motivation, and apathy. By being blamed for their reading difficulty, adolescents were cast as deviant. Struggling readers were then supsended and expelled in disproportionately high numbers. The notion that struggling high school readers are "bad kids" or difficult, as I documented at Moore High, is typical among traditional, comprehensive high schools.

This conflation of reading and behavior may be more prominent in secondary than elementary schools because adolescents are held accountable for their learning and life circumstances in ways that young children are not. In this study, for example, when Evan could not surmount the effects of homelessness, some teachers viewed him as apathetic and unmotivated. Yet, adolescent literacy researchers have focused little attention on the role of behavior positioning in struggling reader identification and intervention. My findings suggest the need for increased investigation of secondary struggling readers' experiences with punitive behavior management practices.

Overall, my findings expand and complicate explications of the role of classroom contexts in literacy learning. They suggest several directions for future research, including, for example, the role of in- and out-of-school histories of participation in literacy learning and the role of race and socioeconomic status in struggling reader intervention and behavior management. In the implications section I elaborate on these and other areas for future research.

The Roles of Power and Authority in the Co-construction of Contexts

I draw on theories of context that foregrounded the role of human interaction. For example, Erickson and Schulz (1997) explained

> Contexts are not simply *given* in the physical setting (kitchen, living room, sidewalk in front of drug store) nor in combinations of personnel (two brothers, husband and wife, firemen). Rather, contexts are constituted by what people are doing and where and when they are doing it (p. 22).

Contexts *are* interactions in space and time. Although Erickson and Schultz asserted contexts "can change from moment to moment" (p. 22), contexts also can stretch through multiple interactions across time. My analysis showed that students and teachers did not start from scratch each time they walked into a particular class period. Actors' histories of participation in a given classroom space (with a relatively stable group of people, norms, and routines) meant that actors constructed a somewhat predictable and consistent range of (supportive and/or limiting) contexts over time in a class period.

Latour also emphasized the constitutive nature of interaction in contexts. From his perspective, tracing actors' interactions and associations reveals networks. A network, therefore, "is not a thing but the recorded movement of a thing…it is not *(sic)* longer

whether a net is a representation of a thing, a part of society or a part of discourse or a part of nature, but what moves and how this movement is recorded" (Latour, 1996, p. 11). Tracing students', teachers', and administrators' interactions among classroom and institutional spaces and processes—instead of analyzing the "things" or the spaces and processes themselves, which did not exist outside of interaction—showed the mediating effects of contexts on students' literacy learning.

What these theories could not explain, however, was how power and authority manifested in and shaped interactions. In my analyses, considering power and distinguishing power from authority helped explain how actors were more likely to construct particular contexts more than others despite the fact that interactions can change moment to moment. For instance, when a youth participant declined to read a particular text, cursed at a teacher, or refused to go to the office for a behavior referral, these were demonstrations of young people's power. Authority, however, rested with teachers, who had the backing of school policy, administration, and security personnel. When a teacher called security to have a young person removed from class against her wishes, the teacher's authority trumped the student's expression of power. Similarly, when a student protested placement in a reading intervention class, institutional policies and processes made a schedule change highly improbable. Overall, analysis showed that although students harnessed power to help construct, mitigate, and change contexts, the positional authority granted to teachers and administrators limited students' opportunities in concrete ways.

Differing consequences for students' and teachers' resistance. Like students, teachers sometimes resisted. This study suggests, however, that the consequences of

teachers' and students' resistance are different among school contexts that reinforce teachers' authority. Although demonstrations of students' agency or resistance often resulted in negative consequences, teachers could leverage their authority to reshape or mitigate institutional processes. In this study, for example, Ms. Talbot and Mr. Henry countered school-wide behavior management approaches by dealing with conflicts in class instead of sending students to in-school suspension. In the midst of a school-wide environment in which struggling readers were accustomed to being positioned as behavior problems and excluded from learning, making the choice to handle conflict in classrooms was not a straightforward or easy route. Some youth expected to be kicked out of class and were not interested or did not know how to have restorative, reflective conversations with teachers. Over time, however, Ms. Talbot and Mr. Henry were able to involve struggling readers in the construction of learning-focused, trusting relationships.

On the other hand, when focal participants resisted behavior management practices (by refusing to leave a class when a teacher asked them to leave), the result was different from Ms. Talbot and Mr. Henry's resistance. Instead of generating productive conversations about learning, expectations, and behavior, students' resistance resulted in youth being escorted out by security. When actors with authority resist, there are powerful opportunities for disrupting and reconstructing school contexts.

Even as youth co-construct contexts with teachers and other school personnel, the co-construction is complicated and power-laden. Theories of context that romanticize evenly distributed roles among all actors cannot explicate how or why co-construction happens or the role co-construction plays in mediating youths' reading. At the same time, theories that fail to attend to co-construction and conceptualize youth as actors without

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agency are equally limiting. Maintaining a complex understanding of power and authority in the co-construction of contexts is necessary to map how actors build networks. Theorizations of how school contexts mediate youths' literacy and schooling experiences must explicate how power, even though it flows unpredictably through complex school networks of interactions and relationships, differs from authority, which affords teachers and other school personnel sway in delimiting many of the terms and conditions of school.

Implications

My findings contribute to an understanding of how actors' participation in (and construction of) institutionalized mechanisms for reader identification and behavior management—with classroom social and instructional interactions—mediate youth reading. Findings indicate that in order to facilitate deep literacy learning for all students, disrupting the positioning of young people as deficit readers is necessary. The study has implications for schools, teaching, and teacher education; future research; and education policy.

Schools, Teaching, and Teacher Education

In addition to student-centered reading interventions, school leaders and teachers can work with students to improve contexts for literacy learning. To do so requires the reexamination of struggling reader identification processes and labeling practices, which are related to intervention placement and de facto tracking. Dismantling tracking (or mitigating its hindering effects) would be supported by the reorganization of secondary literacy support programs.

Reorganizing secondary literacy intervention. Reorganizing literacy instruction requires that secondary schools implement more flexible scheduling practices. When high school master schedules are complicated and rigid as Moore High's was, it is difficult to flexibly respond to students' learning strengths and needs by changing their class schedules. This study suggests that struggling high school readers remain locked in ill-suited classes even when students and teachers recognize that a change in classes or curriculum would be helpful to students' learning.

Another avenue for reorganization is to move away from stand-alone reading intervention programs and instead invest resources (e.g., time, professional development, funding) in disciplinary literacy instruction across content area classes. In other words, schools can teach disciplinary literacy in all classes instead of relegating reading and writing instruction to intervention classrooms. (I did not study students with identified learning disabilities, and I am not advocating for the elimination of special education services for students with significant reading or learning challenges.) As in the case at Moore High, stand-alone programs, such as Read 180, do not typically align with content area curriculum. Therefore, intervention instruction may not support young people to navigate the literacy demands they encounter across their coursework. Moreover, these literacy demands are becoming increasingly complex with the adoption of the Common Core State Standards. High schools require youth to grapple with advanced texts and engage in sophisticated literacy practices across subject areas. One way to help young people meet these rigorous learning standards is through disciplinary literacy instruction, which emphasizes disciplinary ways of reading, writing, thinking, and arguing (Moje, 2008).

Teaching disciplinary literacy. Teaching disciplinary literacy practices is a "currently under-recognized form of instruction that could transform the learning opportunities for all students, from those who are high achieving and college-bound to those who are at risk of dropping out of high school" (Rainey & Moje, 2012, p.73). Often reserved for high-achieving students, disciplinary literacy provides a means by which youth can build knowledge and skills in meaning-focused ways. Some teachers and school instructional leaders believe that this kind of rigorous teaching and learning lends itself to advanced placement and honors classes in which students are thought to have the requisite skills and knowledge. Disciplinary literacy learning, however, can be accessible to all students. It is not a matter of students' readiness but one of teachers' instruction. Through instructional apprenticeship, all youth can learn how to engage in disciplinary thinking, reading, and writing.

The instruction struggling readers typically experience, however, can be antithetical to disciplinary literacy. Indeed decontextualized literacy skill-building disservices these youth by failing to apprentice them into disciplinary practices (Lee, 2004). For example, in Read 180's computer-based instruction, high school students work on spelling and word recognition absent attention to disciplinary knowledge. More helpful is instruction that makes transparent the unique and overlapping literacy practices of the various disciplines. This would help youth develop not only the tools but also the positive learning identities necessary to navigate content area classrooms with varying demands and purposes for literacy. Framing the issue as one of civil rights, Carol Lee (2004) asserted,

Until we approach literacy problems in our high schools by emphasizing

strategies for mastering complex disciplinary reading instead of generic reading

abilities, most students will continue to fall behind their more affluent

peers…Disciplinary literacy is the civil right of the twenty-first century (p. 24).

Cast as an inherent right, disciplinary literacy instruction has the potential to disrupt

inequitable patterns in reading intervention wherein young people of color and youth

experiencing poverty are disproportionately identified as struggling readers.

Communicating positive messages. Teachers and administrators send explicit and

implicit messages to students about students' potential and purpose in school, which

influences how young people understand and position themselves. Research has shown

that messaging in school is powerful. For example, Walton and Cohen (2011) found that

a brief, one-time exercise designed to support college freshmen's positive self-messaging

resulted in academic and health gains over three years, particularly among African

Americans. (The exercise involved reading a passage about college trajectories, writing

an essay about one's own goals and sense of belonging in college, and transforming the

essay into a videoed speech that would ostensibly be used to encourage future freshmen.)

Though the study examined college youth, its findings raise questions about the power of

messaging in high school. Educators and researchers need to consider the following

questions: When youth are identified as struggling readers, what messages do they

receive? Moreover, what messages are communicated during long-term placement in

secondary reading intervention?

When secondary literacy programs take an intervention approach as Moore High

did, teachers and administrators focus on identifying, labeling, and remediating reading struggle. A byproduct of these well-intended intervention efforts is negative messaging to students about who they are as readers and young people (see Franzak, 2006). Messages come from ongoing progress monitoring of decontextualized reading skills (e.g., reading fluently, summarizing short passages). Even when youth make progress, these assessments communicate that a struggling reader's goal should be to read quickly or answer questions correctly rather than build knowledge or ask critical questions about the world. When young people perform poorly on ill-conceived intervention assessments, students are further positioned as struggling and deficient.

Negative messages also come from behavior positioning. When teachers consistently reprimand youth or subscribe to school-wide punitive approaches, struggling readers get the message that they are deviant people. Even in the midst of positive behavior programs (e.g., prizes doled out based on youths' accumulation of points for good behavior), teachers often fail to recognize struggling readers' positive contributions (as in the classrooms using positive rewards at Moore High). Thus a program designed to increase positive messages and incentivize constructive behavior can inadvertently constrain young people already labeled in deficit ways.

High schools cannot only disrupt programs by which negative messages ensue, but also experiment with positive messaging exercises such as the one studied by Walton and Cohen (2011). It may be that brief but powerful opportunities to receive encouraging messages (and generate self-messages) have lasting effects for struggling readers. (Moreover, longer-term positive messaging could have more significant effects than brief exercises.) Engaging youth in discussion, writing, and reflection about their potential and

value as members of school communities may bolster academic learning, health, and well-being. It may also mitigate the effects of histories of participation in schools where youth may have been marginalized or constrained as learners. Attending to teachers' messaging—both the content and mechanisms of communication—could help high school be the fruitful place that many ninth graders, including the ones in this study, hope it will be.

Coaching and professional development for teachers. To support in-service teachers, districts and schools can invest in ongoing professional development with in-school instructional coaching from disciplinary literacy experts. In such a model, coaches tailor seminars, coaching, and materials to the specific needs of schools, departments, teachers, and students. This kind of professional development is expensive and, by virtue of its tailored nature, does not necessarily scale quickly or easily to widespread implementation. Redirecting resources currently used to purchase costly intervention curricula and, as in the case of Moore High, monitor intervention fidelity, would create fiscal resources for specially designed professional development and teacher coaching.

To help preservice teachers develop disciplinary literacy pedagogical knowledge and skills, teacher education programs can devote time to targeted disciplinary literacy teaching and learning. For example, at the University of Michigan, instead of taking a generic content area literacy course, preservice secondary teachers take a discipline-specific literacy course (e.g., *Using Literacy to Teach and Learn Mathematics in the Secondary Schools*). These courses afford opportunities to discuss literacy as a social practice as well as the use and production of texts within particular disciplines. Moreover, disciplinary literacy instructional programs can rotate preservice teachers among expert

teachers' classrooms (Bain & Moje, 2012) thereby embedding teacher learning in public school spaces and creating apprenticeship opportunities for preservice teachers.

Foregrounding the interaction between social and instructional dimensions in learning. If literacy instruction is strengthened when embedded in trusting, learning-focused interactions, as this study suggests, then emphasizing the role of trusting student-teacher relationships during teacher education is important. To that end, preservice and in-service programs can support teachers to examine their understandings and assumptions about students not only as literacy learners, but also as young people with raced, classed, gendered, and sexed ways of being, interacting, reading, and writing. This kind of teacher education is iterative and requires repeated opportunities to grapple with complex questions of privilege and power. Teacher education programs can facilitate these kinds of discussions throughout course work and field experiences rather than in isolated conversations that occur in a single course or unit of study.

So often educators focus on improving instruction for struggling high school learners and neglect the related, important roles of youths' social belonging, leadership potential, or emotional well-being. Response to Intervention efforts exacerbate this instruction-only mentality by requiring evidence-based practices, which can be narrow teaching practices/programs shown to produce academic gains in quasi-experimental or experimental studies. Instruction, however, is never only 'instruction.' Teaching always happens in social relationships.

Therefore, how teachers regard young people is paramount. The extent to which teachers trust students to take responsibility for their learning, assume leadership positions in classrooms, and seek meaningful connection with others influences the kinds

of student-teacher relationships that are possible. Too often struggling readers are assumed to be work avoidant, uninterested, and apathetic. Although young people have a responsibility to construct positive relationships, the onus is on teachers as professionals to initiate and repeatedly engage youth in positive interactions—even when students hesitate or resist belonging. It is often struggling readers' histories of marginalized participation in school that make adolescents wary of school involvement. It is teachers' responsibility to invite these young people into new modes of participation and relationship with school.

The implications of this study, however, are not that building good relationships should be the sole goal. Instructional and social dimensions of learning are fundamentally intertwined. They spur each other along. To trust students is to teach them well and expect engaged, capable participation. To teach well is to invite critical involvement in which youth construct contexts and shape the landscape of classroom learning and relationships. Both teaching and building relationships with youth hinge on knowing youth and opening ways for young people to know and trust teachers as caring professionals.

Building contextualized notions of proficiency and difficulty. In addition, it is important for educators to examine their interpretations of and assumptions about learning/reading struggle. This can be done through professional development grounded in interactive models of reading (Rumelhart, 1994; Snow, 2002). Also, providing opportunities for teachers to observe and discuss other each other's instruction can foster the kind of reflective practice necessary to unearth assumptions about learning (difficulty). Fostering educators' contextualized understandings of proficiency and

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difficulty will help create learning environments in which youth are perceived as capable and improving students instead of as uniformly poor readers.

Disrupting punitive school behavior management. In addition, if being positioned as a struggling reader coincides with other deficit positioning, particularly as a behavior problem, then another implication for schools is reevaluating discipline and behavior management policies. In this study, focal participants systematically missed school because of out-of-school suspensions at disproportionately high rates. What I could not count, however, was the amount of time participants missed class because teachers' sent them to the hallway, in-school suspension, or an administrator's office. The school did not track these data. Over time, as some youth were regularly pushed out of classes, they chose to skip classes. As I conducted the study and walked the hallways during class hours, I regularly encountered focal participants and other struggling readers who had been asked to leave class for behavioral reasons or who had chosen not to attend.

These kinds of classroom environments, which are at best uninviting and at worst hostile for struggling readers, are not uncommon in traditional high schools. The solution may seem obvious, but teachers need to keep struggling readers in class by working with youth to create meaningful social and instructional contexts in which youths' voices matter. Moreover, districts need to track not only out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, but also the day-to-day practices by which many young people are excluded. As this study suggests, struggling readers may be missing substantially more class time than commonly collected attendance/behavior data indicate. Tracking actual missed instruction would help instill a sense of urgency among districts and schools to reorient

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behavior management practices that disproportionately affect struggling readers, youth of color, and youth experiencing poverty.

Because young people have somewhat limited power to resist, positioning and authority is weighted towards administrators and teachers, school personnel (and teacher education programs) have a special responsibility to disrupt processes by which students are cast as compromised learners or people—and work with students to create equitable literacy learning opportunities.

Directions for Future Research

Moving forward, the following directions for research will build on this study's findings and contribute to improving literacy learning opportunities for young people.

Understanding different youths' construction of and participation in school contexts. Research needs to examine the question of how young people from different groups (e.g., learners of varying SES and racial and ethnic identifications) participate in and construct school contexts for literacy learning. Because literacy is always culturally and socially situated, students' cultural and linguistic identities, knowledge, and practices contribute to how they participate in school contexts. If particular identities, knowledge, and practices are privileged in school, then it is important to document how students who command to varying extents these privileged discourses experience and build the contexts of schooling.

The role of race and class in struggling reader identification and behavior positioning. This study suggests that teachers' have raced and classed notions of both reading proficiency and appropriate school behavior. Although variability in my sample prevented a close analysis of the role of racial and ethnic identities, it bears noting that

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young people of color were overrepresented among struggling readers both in the school population and in the study sample. When I asked teachers to recommend comparative peers who were strong readers and high achievers, teachers identified white students in disproportionately high numbers compared to the school population.

Moreover, students' economic status appeared involved in teachers' perceptions of difficulty. When focal participants became distracted in school because of hardships related to socioeconomic strain (e.g., homelessness, hunger, lack of health care), teachers tended to assume students were unmotivated rather than search for other explanations. Researchers need to investigate to what extent adolescents who are negotiating the effects of poverty are perceived as apathetic or unmotivated and how these perceptions contribute to struggling reader identification.

If teachers view young people's social, economic, and cultural identifications as related with learners' potential, skill, and value, then more research is clearly necessary to help disrupt inequitable positioning by race and class in reading intervention programs. Although some adolescent literacy researchers have examined the roles of race and ethnicity in struggling reader identification (e.g., Gutiérrez et al., 2009), more work is needed. Special education and disability researchers have pursued questions of race, culture, and poverty in the identification and construction of behavior disorders and learning disabilities (e.g., Artiles 1998, 2003). These lines of research have productively contributed to ongoing scrutiny of special education practices (e.g., O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006; McDermott et al., 2006). There has been less attention, however, to the intersecting issues of racial identities, economic status, and behavior positioning in adolescent literacy research. If struggling reader identification is not further

problematized on dimensions of culture and class, the field's efforts to empirically ground and disseminate effective pedagogical approaches risk reinforcing (if not promoting) inequitable practices.

Related to racial identities and economic status, more research is necessary to explicate the role of gender and sexuality in the identification and positioning of struggling readers. Researchers can investigate to what extent demonstrations and interpretations of reading proficiency and struggle involve youths' gender and sexual identities.

The role of struggling reader identification in behavior management and restorative justice. Researchers who examine the extent to which restorative justice programs result in more positive and equitable outcomes than punitive behavior approaches (e.g., Karp & Breslin, 2001; Stinchcomb, Bazemore, & Riestenberg, 2006) have considered the roles of race and socioeconomic status. This study suggests that struggling reader identification likely plays a related role, and moving forward these researchers should consider how struggling reader identification and intervention mediate discipline policy and implementation.

The aim of these lines of research should be to not only identify and disrupt racist or classist practices in reading intervention and behavior management, but also to expand notions of literacy proficiency to be culturally inclusive. The cultural and linguistic knowledge and practices that all students bring to bear in school are strengths and should be viewed as such. Research that contributes to teachers' ability to work with young people to extend these strengths would be a boon for youths' learning and schools' efforts to facilitate literacy learning for all.

Examining promising contexts across school spaces. Another research question to consider is, "How can promising contexts for literacy learning be created and maintained across school buildings, across schools, and across districts?" To that end, researchers can investigate what interactions make a context promising and to what extent 'promise' looks different for different students (e.g., high-achieving students, English learners). For struggling readers, this study showed patterns and divergences regarding promise. For example, youths' interactions with particular instructional (e.g., disciplinary literacy) and social arrangements (e.g., positive student-teacher interactions) tended to support youth. Complicating the picture, however, were youths' interactions with some institutional arrangements (e.g., tracking) that were both supportive and constraining (Mr. Henry's tracked algebra class benefited learners, but interactions among other low track courses hindered learners). More research is necessary to explain these patterns and complexities for struggling readers and other learners.

Also important to consider is how the promise of particular interactions—and thus contexts—relates to who teachers are as instructors and people. Because this kind of research takes into account what different actors bring to and create in and through contexts—and actors change from school to school—this research will necessarily lead to flexible, recursive approaches instead of rigid implementation plans.

Understanding the role of histories of participation in and out of school.
Many struggling ninth grade readers have been involved in reading intervention programs in earlier grades. As such when students begin high school, they bring particular histories of participation related with school reading and social life. These histories contribute to how young people view themselves and how teachers see them. For youth who have been

positioned in deficit ways (e.g., scheduled into low-track classes in middle school, identified as a struggling reader for many years), they may rightfully feel wary about teachers' intentions or a reading program's helpfulness. Moreover, high school teachers may have low expectations for these youth, which can contribute to strained student-teacher relationships. For youth with positive histories of participation in school, they may begin high school (even as a newly identified struggling reader) feeling optimistic and entitled to good instruction (as in the case of Mark). Students' past experiences powerfully mediate both how they approach school and how school personnel position them.

Adolescent literacy research has shown that young people's literacy identities evolve through participation and positioning in a classroom (e.g., Hall, 2007; Wortham, 2006). These studies use varying methods to examine youth within one classroom for a portion of the school year (e.g., Dillon, 1998; Hall, 200X; Hinchman & Zalewski, 1996; Wortham, 2006). I extended this body of work by examining the same young people across multiple classrooms, researching youths' school histories through interviews and analysis of past school records, and systematically collecting data 3-4 days per week for an entire school year. As a result, my findings begin to account for the important role of histories of participation in contexts. This study suggests that it is important for researchers to recognize that adolescent readers do not enter high schools (or studies) as blank slates. Rather, with every passing day, students build on their histories of participation across high school contexts, and these evolving histories are related with the identities youth enact and are ascribed. To explicate the interaction among histories of

participation, identity enactments, and positioning, longitudinal studies of youth across secondary spaces are necessary.

In addition, although researchers have examined youths' out-of-school literacies and identities, more research is necessary to explain what these out-of-school-time histories of participation mean for identity enactment and positioning in school. This study suggests that positive public recognition in extracurricular activities buffered some of the limiting effects of struggling reader identification. That is, a positive history of participation in other contexts appeared to help support struggling readers' resilience in school. For example, Mark and Mai See, who were accomplished dancers in their home communities (Mark in break dance and Mai See in Hmong dance), appeared to engage with school and reject negative identity ascriptions even when faced with constraining circumstances. Participants with talents and interests that were solitary and did not afford public recognition (e.g., Aziza reading young adult fiction, Calvin playing video games, Javier drawing, Evan skate boarding) did not appear to have the same buffering effects that Mark and Mai See's dancing may have had. In the end-of-the-school-year arts assembly, Mark and Mai See each performed with their respective dancing groups. In interviews, both young people seemed proud to showcase their talents in school. Future research needs to examine if and how skilled participation in a publicly recognized sphere outside of school helps shore up struggling readers' in-school motivation and identities.

Education Policy

Throughout the past decade adolescent literacy has received widespread attention in policy and research reports (e.g., Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Carnegie Council on

Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010; Kamil, Borman, Dole, Kral, Salinger, &

Torgesen, 2008). These reports emphasized the importance of different aspects of youth

literacy including skills and strategy instruction, disciplinary literacy instruction, and in

and out-of-school literacies. With the advent of the Common Core State Standards,

policymakers and legislators have a unifying set of guidelines for secondary literacy

learning. Similarly, Response to Intervention legislation provides policymakers with

common guidelines for supporting youth with reading and writing difficulty.

   Including attention to context and student-teacher relationships in school

policy. However, in current and past policy efforts, the contexts of schooling and their

role in literacy are under-emphasized. As secondary students move from class to class,

they encounter different literacy purposes, norms, participation structures, and texts. The

onus to integrate literacy knowledge, skills, and practices across contexts and classroom

spaces is on students. Recognizing that all youth, even high-achieving youth, need

support to navigate complex secondary schedules with diverse literacy demands,

policymakers need to address the role of context in adolescent literacy teaching and

learning. In addition, the importance of fostering positive student-teacher relationships

(as one key dimension of classroom contexts) deserves attention in policies and standards

intended to spur support for struggling readers.

   As schools and teachers closely align instruction to standards, the language of

policy enters school spaces in concrete ways (e.g., standards posted on unit assignments

and classroom walls; discussion of standards at teacher staff meetings). Thus standards

have a broad platform from which to communicate which aspects of learning are

institutionally valued. Broadening standards to explicitly address positive student-teacher

relationships and positive learning contexts would not only help provide a roadmap for how to affect such changes, but also communicate the paramount place of positive human interactions in teaching and learning.

Literacy researchers have critiqued that investigating only 'what works' in literacy instruction—and making corresponding policy recommendations—is too narrow. Rather examining what works, for whom, when, and why yields more productive knowledge and ideas for supporting all young people to read and write (argue, warrant, and think) effectively in school. Expanding beyond the 'what works' paradigm requires attention to issues of student-teacher relationships and contexts in adolescent literacy policy.

Facilitating school reform and institutional change. Facilitating productive contexts requires both classroom-based and institutional changes. Another research question to consider then is, "When and how do education policies promote institutional change that supports students to engage in positive interactions among secondary literacy contexts?" Collaborating with scholars who study policy, institutional change, and school reform (e.g., Bryk et al., 1998; Sarason, 1996; Weiss, 1995), literacy scholars can help imagine how to involve youth in institutional arrangements and processes that would work in tandem with classroom-based interactions to deepen youths' literacy.

This study suggests that ever-shifting priorities and reforms in literacy education tax teachers' motivation and resources. Researchers should examine the tolls and benefits of shifting literacy reforms. What are the differences between an agile approach that reshapes programs in response to new research and an untethered approach that rotates

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through literacy programs without gaining traction? In addition, how do shifting reforms shape secondary literacy instruction and struggling reader identification?

Conclusion

The experiences of students and teachers at Moore High are telling and provide a cautionary tale for educators and researchers. Despite well-intended practitioners and institutional processes for reading intervention, teachers and struggling readers tended to participate in school contexts in ways that predominantly constrained young people's literacy learning. In a discourse of remediation and intervention, struggling reader labels were associated with deficit learning, disengagement, apathy, defiance, and irresponsibility. Solutions to this deficit positioning do not lie in simply relabeling students or abandoning school reading programs. After all, the real dilemma of making meaning with (and producing) complex texts challenges many secondary students. If schools are to be places in which all students can meet those challenges with the requisite literacy skills, practices, and identities—and grow as young people—then new approaches to secondary literacy teaching and revised perceptions of literacy difficulty and proficiency will help. Identifying and closely analyzing when and why struggling youth readers enact (and are positioned to enact) improving and proficient reading-related skills and practices and productive learning identities is one way forward. This study provides a foundation for future research—my own and others'—to investigate how school leaders and teachers, together with youth, can disrupt deficit discourses and construct positive school contexts through which students can grow as readers, writers, thinkers, and people.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Overall study timeline

Data Source	Ethnographic Phase			Structured Phase						
	September	October	November	December	January	February	March	April	May	June
Foundational	Become acquainted with school culture, routines, space	Identify & consent focal participants (FPs) and teacher participants (TPs)	Identify & consent focal participants (FPs) and teacher participants (TPs)	Identify comparative peer participants (CPs)	Consent comparative peer participants (CPs)	Consult Ts & Ss about initial findings				Consult Ts & Ss about initial findings
Student questionnaire		FP questionnaire								
Observations	Observations of potential participants	Observations of potential participants	Observations of participants	Rotating week-long shadows of FPs	Rotating week-long shadows of FPs	Rotating week-long shadows of FPs	Rotating week-long shadows of FPs	Rotating week-long shadows of FPs	Rotating week-long shadows of FPs	Rotating week-long shadows of FPs
Interviews	OEIs	OEIs	OEIs FP SSIs-Round 1	OEIs FP SSIs Round 1 T SSIs Round 1	OEIs FP RPIs Round 1 T SSIs Round 1	OEIs CP SSIs	OEIs CP SSIs	OEIs FP SSIs-Round 2 FP RPIs Round 2	OEIs FP SSIs-Round 2 T SSIs Round 2	OEIs T SSIs Round 2
Literacy assessments		Collect 8th grade assessment data	Collect Q1 literacy assessments Administer TORC	Administer TORC		Collect Q2 literacy assessment data		Collect Q3 literacy assessment data		Collect Q4 literacy assessment data
Student records			Collect Q1 achievement, attendance, & behavior records			Collect Q2 achievement, attendance, & behavior records		Collect Q3 achievement, attendance, & behavior records		Collect Q4 achievement attendance, & behavior records
Classroom artifacts & photographs	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing

Appendix B: Student questionnaire for focal participants
(Adapted from Hall, 2007)

Name: _____

1. How old are you?

2. What do you like doing for fun? _____

3. What is something that is unique thing about you? _____

_____

4. What times in school do you enjoy the most? Why?

_____

_____

5. What are your least favorite times? Why? _____

_____

6. When is reading easy for you? Why? _____

_____

7. When is reading difficult for you? Why? _____

_____

8. If reading is difficult, what do you do? (Some possible things might be: try to read it by myself; ask a friend for help; ask someone to read it for me; ask the teacher for help; I don't read it; ask someone to tell me what it says.)

_____

_____

9. In general, how good of a reader do you think you are? What makes you think that?

_____

_____

10. In general, how do you feel about reading? Why? _____

_____

11. What kinds of things do you read in school? _____

_____

12. Do you read outside of school? What kinds of things?_____

_____

13. How often do you read outside of school (circle one):
    Not at all/hardly ever   Less than 30 minutes a day
    30-60 minutes a day   More than 60 minutes a day

14. In general, how good are you at writing? Really good, okay, poor? How do you know?

_____

15. In general, how do you feel about writing? Why? _____

_____

16. What kinds of things do you write in school? _____

_____

17. Do you write outside of school? What kinds of things? _____

_____

Thanks for answering these questions and sharing your thoughts!

Appendix C: Protocols for semi-structured interviews with focal participants
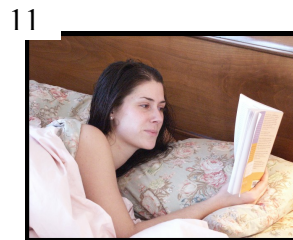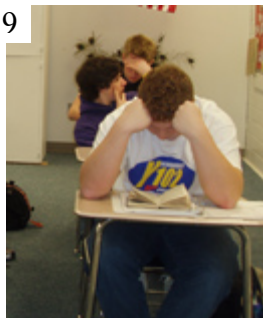
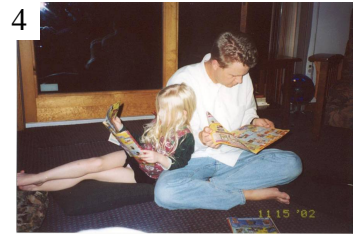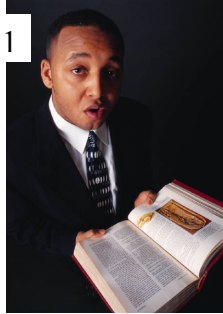Student Semi-Structured Interview
Adapted from Moje et al., 2008

ROUND 1 – FALL - FOCAL PARTICIPANT SSI
See next page.

To begin to document various contexts for reading;

1. Here are some pictures of different people reading different things in different ways:

Which one of these pictures *looks most like* something you would do?

Which one *sort of looks like* something you would do?

Which one *looks least like* you something you would do?

2. Some people feel that reading and writing are very important skills to have in order to be a successful and happy person in the world, other people say it doesn't matter. What do you think about that?

> To begin to understand what youths see as general school contexts and how youths experience those contexts.

3. I have been observing in in many of your classes, (insert some names of classes). You have mentioned that you feel most confident during X times in school. Can you say more about that? Why do you feel confident in those times or places?

4. You have said you feel least comfortable during X times. What is happening in those situations? What would help you feel more comfortable?

5. When or where do you feel like you do good work in school? Why?

6. During X class, you seemed pretty interested in doing X? Is that right? Why were you interested?

7. Are there any times or situations in school when the time passes really quickly?
   a. What makes the time go quickly?
   b. What is happening in those situations?

8. Are there any times or situations in school when the time passes really slowly?
   a. What makes the time go slowly?
   b. What is happening in those situations?

9. Are any of your friends in any of your classes this year?
   a. What's it like to be in a class that has some of your friends versus a class without many of your friends?

10. Is there anything you learned in school last year that you're using in school (or X class) this year?
    a. What is it? How are you using that learning now?

> To begin to understand what youths see contexts related to their reading and how youths experience those contexts:

11. You've mentioned that you enjoy reading X?
    a. When do you read X?
    b. Where do you read X?

12. On your questionnaire you wrote that reading is easy for you when X?

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a. Why do you think X makes reading easy?

b. When does that seem to happen (when reading is easy because of X)?

c. Where does that seem to happen?

13. What kinds of things are easy to read and understand in school? Why?

14. When is it easy for you to understand what you read in school? Why?

15. What kinds of things are difficult to read and understand in school? Why?

16. When are things difficult to read and understand in school? Why?

17. On your questionnaire you wrote that reading can be difficult when X?

a. What makes reading difficult in those situations?

b. What do you do when reading is difficult in those situations?

c. What helps your reading in those situations?

i. Why do you think that helps your reading?

ii. Has it always helped your reading?

18. What have you been reading in X class?

a. What do you think about it? Do you find it interesting? Why or why not?

b. How easy or difficult is it to understand? Why?

c. What are you supposed to do with the information you get from reading X in that class?

19. When in school do you read with others? What is happening in those situations?

20. When in school do you read by yourself?

21. Do you ever have a preference about whether you read alone or read with others?

a. If so, why do you prefer one to the other in those situations?

To begin to understand how youths participate in and construct contexts for learning and reading:

---

22. During X class, what do you think your role was in the small group when you were working on X?

23. In general, what do you think your role is in X class?

a. Why do you think that is your role in the class?

24. Can you think of any times when you felt like you really got to choose what you were doing/reading/writing?

a. What was happening in those situations?

b. What were the choices? What did you choose to do/read/write? Why?

25. Can you describe any times in school when kids 'have a say' about what is going on or when kids are in charge of a situation?

    a. What was happening in those situations?

26. Can you describe any times when you didn't feel like you 'had a say' in what was going on?

    a. What was happening in those situations?

27. Can you think of any times in school when you were asked to read or write something that you really did not feel like reading or writing?

    a. What was happening in those situations?

    b. How did you handle the situation?

28. What do you think the teacher thinks of you in X class (or during X activity)?

    a. Do you think the teacher has an accurate perception of you?

29. What do you think other students think of you in X class (or during X activity)?

    a. Do you think the teacher has an accurate perception of you?

| To begin to document various identities for reading. |

30. Do you see yourself as a reader?

31. Do any of your teachers see you as a reader?

32. Do any other students see you as a reader?

33. Do your family members see you as someone who likes reading?

34. When you get gifts and presents from family members, do they ever give you books that suit your interests?

35. When was the last time that a member of your family bought you a book?

| To identify specific reasons for reading and writing. |

36. How often do you read just for fun?

37. Can you give me an example [e.g., title] of one of the things that you read for fun?

38. Why do you find it fun to read [insert the text named by the participant]?

To identify and begin to collect specific texts and text types that youth are reading and writing;

39. What kinds of things do you read in order to help yourself or other people get things done?

(probes, if necessary)

- Manuals
- Recipes
- Catalogs
- Sewing patterns
- Internet web pages
- Instructions
- References (dictionary, atlas, encyclopedia)
- Phone book
- Bus schedules
- Family mail
- Newsletters
- Newspaper

To begin to identify social networks in which reading and writing occur and to document how those networks mediate the reading and writing practices

40. How many books would you say you have in your house?

41. Do you read things together with your family members? (e.g. newspapers, TV guide, sports reports, magazines, family letters/emails, official letters)

42. How often do you go to the local library to borrow books, CDs, videos? With whom?

43. Do your friends have books that they share with you? What are they?

44. Do you share books with your friends? Which ones?

To begin to document intersections between print and visual media practices;

45. How often do you use the computer?

46. Do you use the internet (www) to read information about your favorite actors/heroines/heroes/sporting stars/singers/bands/musicians?

47. Are there things you see and hear about on television that you then go and read more about those things on the internet or in books?

48. Do you ever buy / borrow books or magazines about your favorite films or performers?

49. What kinds of computer games do you like to play?

50. Have you ever done fanfiction writing on line or with friends on paper?

51. What do you know about websites or blogs?

WRITING

To begin to identify what, how, and why youth engage in particular writing practices.

52. Do you write outside of school?

53. What do you write?

54. Why do you write?

55. How often do you write?

56. How good at writing are you? (Probe: not at all good… very good)

57. How often do you write just for fun?

58. What kinds of things do you write just for fun?
   - Comic books
   - Teen 'zines
   - Newspaper (school, local, or other) contributions
   - Chapter books (not for school work)
   - Information books (biographies, how-to books, science, books about different subjects)
   - Picture books
   - Internet web pages
   - Email
   - Bible, Catechism, Torah, Koran, or other religious writings
   - Poetry
   - Music lyrics
   - Letters or notes
   - Catalog order forms

59. Do you write [insert the text participant named] with other people? What kinds of people?

60. Who do you write for?

61. Who reads the things you write?

62. What makes you really *want to write* something?

63. What makes you really *not want to write* something?

64. Do you ever write in order to help yourself or other people get things done? (e.g. instructions, recipes, family mail).

ROUND 2 – SPRING - FOCAL PARTICIPANT SSI

INTRODUCTION
1. What's one word you would use to describe yourself? Why?

READING/LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN SPECIFIC CLASS
2. What do you think of X class? Do you like it? Why or why not?

3. What have you been reading in X class?
    a. What do you think about it? Do you find it interesting? Why or why not?
    b. What are you supposed to do with the information you get from reading X in that class?
    c. How easy or difficult is it to understand? Why? What makes it easy? If it's difficult, are there things that help?

4. Can you think of any times in this class or other classes when you were asked to read or write something that you really did not feel like reading or writing?
    a. What was happening in those situations?
    b. How did you handle the situation?

5. When Ms./Mr. X gives you the option to work in groups or alone on an assignment, what do you typically choose? Why?

6. Can you think of times in this class when the time goes really quickly? What is happening?

7. Are there times in this class when the time goes really slowly? What is happening?

8. How would students in this class describe you?

9. How would the teacher describe you?

10. How would you describe yourself in this class?

READING ACROSS CLASSES
11. Can you think of ways that you read in this class that are different from ways you read in other classes? If so, what are they?

READING IDENTITY AND READING IN/OUT OF SCHOOL
12. In general do you see yourself a reader? Why?

13. Do other people see you as a reader?

14. In general, how good of a reader are you? What makes you think that?

15. How often do you read just for fun? Can you give me an example [e.g., title] of one of the things that you read for fun? Why do you find it fun to read [insert the text named by the participant]?

Appendix D: Protocol for semi-structured interviews with comparative peers

INTRODUCTION
1. What's one word you would use to describe yourself? Why?

READING/LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN SPECIFIC CLASS
2. What do you think of X class? Do you like it? Why or why not?

3. What have you been reading in X class?
    a. What do you think about it? Do you find it interesting? Why or why not?
    b. What are you supposed to do with the information you get from reading X in that class?
    c. How easy or difficult is it to understand? Why? What makes it easy? If it's difficult, are there things that help?

4. Can you think of any times in this class or other classes when you were asked to read or write something that you really did not feel like reading or writing?
    a. What was happening in those situations?
    b. How did you handle the situation?

5. When Ms./Mr. X gives you the option to work in groups or alone on an assignment, what do you typically choose? Why?

6. Can you think of times in this class when the time goes really quickly? What is happening?

7. Are there times in this class when the time goes really slowly? What is happening?

8. How would students in this class describe you?

9. How would the teacher describe you?

10. How would you describe yourself in this class?

READING ACROSS CLASSES
11. Can you think of ways that you read in this class that are different from ways you read in other classes? If so, what are they?

READING IDENTITY AND READING IN/OUT OF SCHOOL
12. In general do you see yourself a reader? Why?

13. Do other people see you as a reader?

14. In general, how good of a reader are you? What makes you think that?

15. How often do you read just for fun? Can you give me an example [e.g., title] of one of the things that you read for fun? Why do you find it fun to read [insert the text named by the participant]?

Appendix E: Protocols for semi-structured interviews with teachers

<u>ROUND 1 - FALL - TEACHER SSI</u>

TEACHING AND LEARNING
1. What are your overall goals for students in your class? Why?

2. What (e.g., materials, instruction, curriculum) most help students meet those goals?

3. To what extent is there coordination among teachers in your discipline?

4. What about students who have difficulty in the class? Why do you think they usually struggle?

5. Are there specific times or activities when students might typically have difficulty? What are they?

6. Are there supports that usually help students who have difficulty? If so, what?

7. For students who have difficulty, what kinds of academic or learning identities do they have (or enact) in this class? (i.e., I am the kind of person who is a student. I can do good school work. I am a reader.) Is there anything (e.g., instruction, social supports) that seems to support those identities? If so, what? Why/how does it work?

READING AND WRITING
8. What is the role of reading and writing in your class?
    a. What kinds of things do students read and write in this class?
    b. What is typically in a "packet"? (The students talk about reading packets.)
    c. Do you ever use textbooks?

9. Are there ways of reading or writing in your discipline that are unique or different from other disciplines? What?

10. What are the demands of the texts you assign? What is easy or challenging about these texts for students?

11. If the reading is difficult for students, is there anything (e.g., instruction, differentiated texts) that seems to support students? What? Why/how does it work?

SPECIFIC STUDENTS (PARTICIPANTS)
12. What about student X? What do you think are her/his strengths and learning needs? Why?

13. What do you think would most help the student with those learning needs?

14. Are there things that might maximize the student X's strengths in this class? What?

15. Have you had a chance to observe or interact with student X in any other places or times? If so, what settings? How were your interactions the same or different from interactions in this class?

TEXTS AND STUDENT WORK SAMPLES

16. Do you have a text (representative of a typical text in this class) that I could use for a reading process interview? It could be one you will use in the future or have used in the past, but preferably one that students haven't read.

17. Do you have work samples of student X?

ROUND 2 - SPRING - TEACHER SSI

REFLECTING ON INSTRUCTION

1. How do you think this year went? Do you feel like you met your goals? Please explain.

2. What do you think the role of literacy was in your classes this year?

3. What most helps you support all students to learn in your classes? What particularly helps the students who have difficulty with reading? Why?

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORTS AND CONSTRAINTS

4. Is there anything about the way the school is currently set up or organized that really helps students who are having difficulty? Please explain.

5. Is there anything that the district is doing (i.e., initiatives, policies) that seems to help students who are having difficulty? Please explain.

6. What changes would you like to see made at the school or district or state level that would better support all students to learn? (e.g., institutional level or systems level changes, changes in policy, changes in ways schools are arranged, changes in initiatives)

SPECIFIC STUDENTS (PARTICIPANTS)

7. What about student X (focal participant)? In what ways do you think they've grown as a reader/student? What are their remaining areas for growth?

8. What about student Y (comparative peer)? In what ways do you think they've grown as a reader/student? What are their remaining areas for growth?

9. What differentiates a student like student X (focal participant) from a student like student Y (comparative peer) in your classes?

Appendix F: Protocol for think-aloud reading process interviews with students
(From Moje et al., 2008)

This protocol is to be used as a guide when talking with students as they participate in the reading process interview (RPI). The basic intent will be followed. However, questions will change to fit either the choice text or the textbook passage. Questions may also vary with based on how the student is responding to the activity. You will be collecting an RPI using a textbook text from the prepared package as well as from a choice text. Also, not all of the questions listed for each section must be used. Use what is most appropriate and take cues from the student about how much they can/ are willing to answer.

You may also need to prompt students to find out more about what they tell you without "leading" them to think a certain way. You can use the prompts as appropriate to probe for information about the protocol questions. You can use your own prompts.

General prompts:
Tell me more about that.
You say that because…
What else do you know about this?
Why were you thinking about that?
What does that mean to you?
You said….. I'd really like to know more about that.

I. Preview Questions
At the beginning you need to find out what text the student is reading. For the **choice text**, ideally, the student should bring a text. If they don't have one, take one that is appropriate based on information you gained from the SSI.

For the **textbook text,** the student will read a text from a classroom selected for ongoing context observations. You will want to use the starting and stopping points marked in the text. Tell the student ahead of time to stop at that marker to tell you what she is thinking about.

Choice Text	Textbook Text
(These will also vary based on whether	**(Have student choose the text to read)**
the student brought a text or not)	
Book title	Title/ Description of passage
Author	Why did you choose the [science] passage?
	Why would you prefer to read it instead of the other?
What do you think this book will be about?	
What makes you think that?	
Have you read this book before?	
When? What do you know about it?	Read the heading out loud for me. What do you think
it will be about?	
	What makes you think that?
(OR if they brought the text)	Have you read anything about this before?
Why are you reading this text?	When? What do you already know about it?
What is it about?	
What do you think will happen next?	
Have you read this whole book?	
_____	
What do you like about this text?	
What are you thinking about?	

II. First section of oral reading – both texts – Two sentences

Have the student read the first two or three sentences in the passage. (Where you ask the student to stop has to make sense; i.e. finish a complete thought).

What are you thinking about now?
Can you add to your earlier prediction about what the book (passage) will be about?
Why / how were you able to figure out more about what the text will be about?

III. Oral reading.

Have the student read a pre-determined section of the text orally. In the textbook passages, you will have the student read to the second stopping point. In the choice text, you can have the student choose, or you can choose together. If you brought the text, you can pre-determine this.

Ask the student to read orally to the marked place and that you will ask them what they are thinking about when they get there. Also tell them that if they have something to say about the text, they can stop sooner than that to tell you whatever they want about the text.

Questions for after the oral reading:

Can you tell me what this part was about?
Is there anything important or interesting to you?
 Are there any parts you don't understand?
What kinds of things can you do/ did you do to help you understand better?

Were there any words you didn't understand?
What were they?
What did you do to try to figure them out?
What do you do when you come to a word you don't understand?
What do you think _____ means?

IV. Silent reading – Have the student finish the passage reading silently.

Again, pre-determine a stopping point.
Ask the student to read orally to the marked place and that you will ask them what they are thinking about when they get there. Also tell them that if they have something to say about the text, they can stop sooner than that to tell you whatever they want about the text.

Questions for after the silent reading:

Can you explain to me what this part was about?
What was the whole passage about? Can you summarize everything you read?
Is there anything important/interesting to you?
 Are there any parts you don't understand?
What kinds of things can you do/ did you do to help you understand better?

Were there any words you didn't understand?
What were they?
What do you think ____ Means?
What did you do to try to figure them out?
What do you do when you come to a word you don't understand?

Did you learn something in class about this already? Or did you read any book like this in school? Have you ever read anything similar?

Does this text remind you of anything?

Why do you think you are reading this? (May or may not be appropriate)

V. Additional questions (may have been asked in the SSI) – you are doing two RPIs. These questions should follow the choice text reading.

How often to you go to the library/book store?

What section of the library/ bookstore would you go to first?

What attracts you to a particular book?

How do you know how to keep reading when you choose a new book?

What's your favorite part of [insert book] and why?

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