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Understanding and Supporting Vulnerable Readers: A Ecological Systems Perspective

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Understanding and Supporting Vulnerable Readers: An Ecological Systems Perspective

by

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Committee in charge:

Professor P. David Pearson, Chair
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Abstract

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This dissertation is a case- and cross-case analysis of three fourth-grade children – Bella, Sam, and Ethan – whose paths to literacy have not been easy. It is also a formative experiment of the support provided for these children over the course of a school year. This research is shaped by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory. Bronfenbrenner argues that we can fully understand a child's development only if we consider all the many proximal and distal elements – from home and school environments to parental workplaces to potentially oppressive race, class, and gender factors – that influence that development. Similarly, we can fully understand a child's literacy development only if we consider all the many elements – from texts to teachers to test publishers to language and culture – that influence literacy development. *Vulnerable reader* (Bomer, 1999) is an appropriate term for children who struggle with literacy because it emphasizes the fact that their experience is characterized by a particular sensitivity to disruptions within the literacy ecology. This study is supported by research literature that notes the great variety of challenges faced by vulnerable readers (Buly & Valencia, 2002) and which suggests that beneficial instruction is responsive to each child's specific strengths and challenges (Stevens, van Werkhoven, and Castelijns (2001).

The protocol of support included approximately 30 one-on-one tutorial sessions focused on each child's individual needs and 30 small group sessions during which time the children researched, wrote, and illustrated their own books, as well as reading and discussing a variety of literature selections. All sessions were audio- or video-taped and later transcribed. Additional data sources included a variety of assessments (an Informal Reading Inventory, miscue analysis, think aloud protocols, and the Metacomprehension Strategies Index among them); semi-formal interviews with teachers and parents, as well as the children; and classroom observations.

Case study findings demonstrated that, while each child became a more effective and engaged reader over the course of the intervention, each did so in ways that were quite unique and reflected his/her particular personality; Bella and Ethan, for example, were obviously active in their approach while Sam was much more reserved. The cross-case analysis determined that a variety of ecosystems factors influenced their development. Bella was most affected by the type of tasks employed in the study design, by an apparent lack of access to the health care needed to overcome low-grade but chronic illness, and by her English learner status. For Sam, instruction that presented reading in the same algorithmic way that characterized math (a

curriculum area with which he was successful) was very effective, and an increasing level of comfort with peers supported him as well. Ethan was most influenced by reading texts on topics of great interest, and yet his progress was undermined by frequent moves caused by his family's low socioeconomic status. Formative experiment findings emphasized the importance of building a community of learners in which risk-taking was supported, where help was available when needed, and where success was generously acknowledged. This dissertation provides a model for Tier 3 Response to Intervention – an intense level of support producing levels of achievement and engagement worthy of the time and energy expended.

Contents

List of Figures

Preface

At age 22, college diploma in hand, I went in search of that which my philosophy degree had failed to provide – a practical skill that would both allow me to support myself and to make some positive contribution to the world. I had the great good fortune to stumble into the M.A.T. program at National College of Education. The professors there prepared me well and when one told me that I would feel the strongest connections to students who most resembled me as a child, I believed him.

I had come from a middle-class, well-educated family and was a child for whom everything academic came easily. But when I accepted my first teaching job in a predominantly White working class Chicago suburb, which children captured my heart and my imagination? There were the two Danny's. Danny A's misbehavior only increased as I repeatedly kept him after school. I finally figured out that he didn't want to go home to a chaotic household and we cut a deal that if he behaved, he could stay after school and if he did not, he had to go home. Danny N., left alone in the middle of the night by a foster mother who spoke only French, received every support service the school had to offer. We soon learned that we had to be careful not to praise him too much or his achievement would plummet, I suspect because he feared this meant we, too, would abandon him.

A few years later, I moved to Seattle and took a job as a reading intervention teacher in an inner city middle school. Many of my students were as old as fifteen, just biding their time until they could drop out of school. There was Renaldo, fully able to sweet-talk me into making decisions I would later regret— like the day he convinced me it was a really good idea to let him go down to the cafeteria and ask the cook to give us some freshly-baked rolls for a snack. Gun-toting Robert looked at me through eyes that chilled me to the core. A born-again Christian girl gave me hell all year long and then, in June, pronounced me a "savior of children." And then there were the collection of break dancers; of my 45 students, they took seven of the eight top prizes in a school contest – not surprising since they break- danced in the door, to the pencil sharpener, around the book case, when asked to provide an answer to a question, and out the door. I knew I'd gotten through to them when they started stealing my books.

From that point on, my teaching path was set – I wanted to work with children who were largely disenfranchised from the school systems in which they and their parents had placed great faith – specifically children who, unlike me, found literacy – and school more generally – to be a source of frustration. In service of this goal, I worked as a reading specialist and as a literacy coach whose primary duty was to assist other teachers who had the same commitment to children who struggled in school as I did. To no one's surprise, when I entered graduate school, these children remained at the core of my mission.

I have selected Bomer's (1999) term *vulnerable reader* to refer to students whose road to literacy is a bumpy one – and not for lack of other options. Over the course of the past century or so, a variety of names for these children have fallen in and out of favor. While *struggling reader* is the most commonly-used term at present, *vulnerable reader* places the onus for reading difficulty right where it belongs – in the disruption of the reader's complex and multi-faceted ecology. This ecology – specifically Bronfenbrenner's (1979) conception of it – will be discussed fully in the theoretical framework section.

Acknowledgements

Every dissertation I've ever read begins with professional acknowledgements, saving students, family, and friends for later. I want these groups here – front and center.

Both my parents had Ph.Ds. (my father in economics and my mother in education) and so I grew up believing that regular people did this. My father did not live to see me begin graduate school and my mother – who regularly asked me during my second year if I was finished yet – did not live to see me complete it. They cared far more about my personal life, I suspect, than they did about this fancy degree, but would have been proud nonetheless. I grew up with the clear message that I could do anything I wanted to do and that message came from them.

The 4th grade students in the first class I was lucky enough to teach came next on the scene. It all started with Jeff Hoehne who, for some never-explained reason, saw me struggle with management, yelled, "Hey, didn't you hear her say be quiet!" and went on to serve in this leadership capacity until I got my sea legs. Next came the break-dancing 11-15 year olds in my middle school reading intervention class who tried my patience and, in the end, embraced me like the mother figure I must have seemed to them. Then there were the children who attended the Literacy Academies I ran in a range of Bay Area schools and finally the 6th graders whose poetry made my heart sing. I dare say I have learned something from every child I've been lucky enough to teach (including, most especially, those in this dissertation study) – probably more, in fact, than they learned from me.

When I left Seattle to move to the Bay Area (kicking and screaming, I must say), I brought with me one sweet and eager little boy and birthed another soon thereafter. I had never been one of those girls who knew from a young age that I wanted to be a mother, but I took to the role like relish on a hotdog. Ryan and Brett are young men now, each shaping for himself his own life. Because Brett had been living with me during my graduate coursework, I often worried that my studies were subsuming too much time and that would somehow undermine our strong relationship. And then I read his college application essay in which he noted that he had learned so much from me about managing his time and reducing stress. For the guy who practically finishes my sentences – thanks, Brett. Just the other day Ryan looked at me and said, "I think the most important work you have to do is just beginning" – thanks, Ryan.

After two years as a single parent, Stuart Moody came into my life. The most important thing about Stuart is that I've never had to explain to him why, even at my age, I still hope to save the world. In a school project that required Ryan to come up with a single adjective to describe each parent, he dubbed me strong-willed and Stuart friendly. And friendly he is. For an introvert like me, it is great to see a model of what another approach to life can be and suggest that just maybe I can be a little more like him. Unlike so many other dissertation writers before me, I like to slog away at the writing until the whole thing is basically done before I share it with people I care about. He will read the manuscript (and support it) when I am ready for that.

And I can't forget Paula Holt. In the midst of writing her own dissertation, she helped me process all the emotional ups-and-downs along the way. Paula sees the parts of me I can't seem to recognize in myself.

There are, of course, a host of professional acknowledgments. They begin with Dick Allington who, I suspect, took pity on me and convinced editors to publish my first article in *The Reading Teacher* in 1996 after it had been "revised and re-submitted" a total of four times. Then there was Elaine Garan. I introduced myself to her at a conference one day many years ago, she treated me like we'd known each other forever, and that was the beginning of a long friendship. More importantly, it was she, Rich Gibson, and Jonathan Kozol who came immediately to my defense when several colleagues and I got ourselves in hot water over our objection to the heavy-handed implementation of Open Court Reading in the West Contra Costa Unified School District. And a host of deep and abiding relationships resulted from that fiasco: Yetta and Ken Goodman, Bess Altwerger, Steve Strauss, Prisca Martens, Susan Ohanian, and Patty Anders. They believed in my ability to teach well and do important scholarly work.

Then there are my newer mentors. First, P. David Pearson; I went to David when I came to realize that, while there were places I could teach the way I knew best to teach and places where I could hang out with the children with whom I felt most comfortable, there was nowhere to do both in the constrained and constraining world of 2005. He convinced me that there was a home for me at Berkeley. When things were hard, he assured me that he cared more about my personal happiness than my professional progress. When I sent him the first four pages of my dissertation, asking whether I needed to tone down the writing style, he encouraged me to proceed with my own, quirky voice and this freed me to be joyful as well as productive in my drafting. He was unflaggingly upbeat and supportive in my job search, even when I send him flurries of emails, each more manic than those previous, and regularly reminded me that things would work out as they ought.

If David is my cheerleader, Pat Shannon has been my conscience. For each time David told me he liked the newest iteration of my work better than the last, Pat said, "But you've forgotten about this . . . you're getting soft about that . . ." He pushed me when that was what was most needed. From the first moment I read Pat's work, I recognized a kindred spirit. He taught me more about class consciousness than I probably wanted to know and helped me to understand its profound explanatory power in a capitalist world that seeks to deny its very existence, as well as the rights of those most oppressed by it.

Laura Sterponi taught Ethnography of Reading and Literacy Theory during my first semester at Berkeley. In the former, I fell into a little classroom ethnography that introduced me to the joys of research and in the latter I began my love affairs with Pierre Bourdieu and Michel de Certeau. And John Kihlstorm. I managed to find my way through a class on consciousness that lived primarily in the realm of cognitive science and spoke in terms that were largely unfamiliar to me. But he tolerated my tendency to go off on little tangents about the few concepts I did understand and, when I told him I was shopping for an outside committee member, he cheerfully volunteered.

The three fourth-grade teachers at Education Without Boundaries – Libby, Katya, and Ellen – generously opened their classrooms to me, let me hang out with them during lunchtime, and tolerated my idiosyncrasies. They reminded me of the intense dedication required of teachers who choose to work in urban environments where nothing comes easily but rewards are many.

And if these folks aren't enough, there are Amy Stornaiuolo and Kate Frankel. Being a cohort ahead of me, Amy seemed to know all the little unspoken tricks of getting through a program that was not always explicit in its expectations. I used her CPHS protocol to craft my own, and went to her for many a reality check. In the thick of my job hunt, she reminded me that it was unlikely that a dean would call me with (or without) a job offer less than two hours after the search committee had met for the first time once the candidates had cleared out. She was, dare I say, ruthless in her evaluation of my writing – the one person I could trust to say exactly what she thought, whether I wanted to hear it or not. Kate and I paired up to study for orals or, more importantly, to hold each other to the promises we made about what we'd do by when. We whined about glitches in the lives of study participants and processed dissertation data together. And then little Abraham Frankel (NOT a pseudonym) arrived on the scene. With my own children long-past the swaddling stage, the times I've spent with him asleep on my shoulder are among the sweetest I've known throughout grad school – the rare times I've allowed myself to do nothing and feel good about it.

There have been moments prior to and during this time period when I have raged against the daily injustices experienced by the children I have come to care so much about. It is in those times (and in happier ones as well), that I've looked to teachers-at-a-distance like Marian Wright Edelman who has said, "If you don't like the way the world is, you change it. You just do it one step at a time."

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) statistics for 2011 tell us that only 34% of the 4th graders who took the test scored at the proficient or advanced levels, while 33% scored below basic. These are not the results we would like to see, nor have they improved significantly since the No Child Left Behind Act began to influence reading instruction in schools ("Top Stories in NAEP Reading," 2011). The preponderance of Reading First funding was directed to primary education. There was an unspoken implication that, if we did a good enough job with K-3 reading instruction, all children – at least eventually – would experience reading success by the time they reached the upper elementary grades. But the related dichotomy of "learning to read" and, later, "reading to learn" has proven to be a false one. To the ranks of children who have struggled since their first days of school are added those who have late-emerging issues (Wanzek, Wexler, Vaughn, & Ciullo, 2010), producing a double whammy for teachers hoping to support their older students.

In this dissertation, I explore the literacy lives of three vulnerable 4th grade readers. While the children shared a number of characteristics, each was unique in the strengths and challenges they brought to the table, their personalities, and their connections – or lack of same – with the various elements of their literacy milieu. In addition, I describe the responsive tutorial and small group instruction that I provided for them in an effort to meet each child's particular needs and to engage them with tasks that encouraged them to think critically and creatively about text. It is my purpose to put a human face on children who are often discussed in the abstract but who are rarely "seen" as individuals, and to celebrate them in all their rich complexity.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

In the following pages, I explain in depth the theoretical framework I've employed to better understand the complexity of the children's experience and review the relevant literature.

Theoretical Framework

> [There are] two essential requirements of a good theory: first, that it can be translated into concrete research designs; and second, that it can be applied to phenomena that it presumes to explain as they are manifested in the actual contexts in which they occur. Need I say that, in the case of human development, these are the contexts of everyday life. (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 5)

As I began to think about the way I hoped to frame the story of my work with vulnerable readers, I knew that I needed to employ a theory that honored the full complexity of their literacy development. For this reason, I was drawn to the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1986; 1993). In this section, I will describe Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as I have come to understand it, including the types of research he would, I believe, find to be compatible with that theory. Then I will discuss recent applications of his theory in the field of education generally and the area of literacy instruction more particularly. Finally, I will explain the liberties I have taken with Bronfenbrenner's model as it relates to vulnerable readers, especially those at the upper elementary grades.

Urie Bronfenbrenner is one of the best known and most influential figures in the field of developmental psychology. While always most concerned about the development of individuals, Bronfenbrenner initially chose to defer this primary interest because he felt that the

field was too focused on short-term experiments that investigated the internal world of particular human beings, ignoring the contexts within which they lived (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). He famously stated that "much of developmental psychology is the science of the strange behavior of children in strange situations with strange adults for the briefest possible periods of time" (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, p. 2).

Ecological Systems Theory

In Bronfenbrenner's view it is simply not possible to understand human behavior and change over time without considering the many and varied elements of the surrounding context. In his book *The Ecology of Human Development* (1979), he argues that "the properties of the person and of the environment, the structure of the developmental settings, and the processes that take place within and between them must be viewed as interdependent and analyzed in systems terms" (p. 41).

Bronfenbrenner (1979; 1986; 1993) delineates five systems that influence individual development:

- Microsystem: "a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 15) (e.g., school *or* home).
- Mesosystem: "comprises the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 22) (e.g., school *and* home).
- Exosystem: "one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 25) (e.g., parental workplace).
- Macrosystem: "the overarching pattern of micro- meso- and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or other extended social structure" (Bronfenbrenner, 1993, p. 25) (e.g., social reproduction, racism, etc.).
- Chronosystem: "the influence on the person's development of changes (and continuities) over time in the environments in which the person is living" (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p. 724) (e.g., "aging" of the environment as well as of the person).

Bronfenbrenner (1976) emphasizes the great complexity of such a system. The interactions of all possible dyads must be acknowledged; for example, public policy with regard to family leave has an impact on both the parental workplace and the home. In addition, an adequate analysis of the ecosystem requires an examination of the *ways* in which distal system elements affect those microsystems in closer proximity to the individual and, ultimately, the individual him/herself. One might ask questions about the ways in one element of the system affects others:

- In what ways do restrictive family leave policies change the dynamic within the home?
- In what ways might more liberal policies affect the work environment?
- And, in the end, how is child development related to the amount of time a parent can be at home just after birth?

Systems can be more or less facilitative of human growth depending on the availability of resources (Tudge, Gray, & Hogan, 1997). For example, a family with more material assets may be able to "buy" more leave time than that provided for all. Likewise, a physical environment that invites exploration and is stable, structured, and predictable promotes personal growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). If there are people and things to interact with and if the child can do so without anxiety, development occurs.

By the late 1980's Bronfenbrenner, noted that "in place of too much research on development 'out of context' we now have a surfeit of studies on 'context without development'" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). In response, he renewed his focus on the individual and adjusted his model accordingly. Bronfenbrenner asserts that, in order to understand development, we need to collect systematic information about the context, the characteristics of the persons within that context, and the processes through which development occurs (Bronfenbrenner, 1988). In fact, the individual's level of development can be defined by the extent to which (s)he influences systems farther and farther removed from his/her proximal experience. He goes so far as to argue that it is the individual's *perception* of the environment, rather than some so-called objective view, that is most significant (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

In what ways do individuals shape the context in which they live, and how are they shaped by it? In short, this varies from person to person (Magnussen, 1995) and those individuals who attract what they need from their environment are most likely to control their own destiny. Bronfenbrenner suggests two categories of personal attributes that are most likely to determine how much enrichment an individual may draw from the environment: *personal stimulus characteristics* and *developmentally instigative characteristics.* Bronfenbrenner (1993) defines the former as those qualities over which a person has no control (e.g., gender or race); these qualities influence the ways in which other people respond to, and the expectations they have for, a given individual (Tudge & Hogan, 2005). While a particular person may also have a predisposition toward certain developmentally instigative characteristics, as time goes on they fall more within that person's control. These qualities include:

> A readiness to seek out and sustain human relationships; intellectual curiosity; a disposition to manipulate, select, elaborate, reconstruct, and even create environments for self and other; and a conception of the self as an active agent in a responsive world. (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 139)

Finally, the degree to which individuals influence their environment is determined by the role(s) they play within that environment, particularly when those roles are firmly established within the societal structure (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Typically, for example, a high-achieving reader whose family has the financial resources necessary to provide enrichment experiences plays a very different "role" within a classroom than does a vulnerable reader whose parents cannot afford these experiences.

Compatible Research Designs

As might be expected, the type of research design appropriate to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory is quite unlike that of typical experimental psychology in which the impact of the laboratory context is rarely taken into account. The latter form of research sacrifices a nuanced understanding of development in the service of theoretical simplicity. Too

often when efforts are made to study single variables – say, the impact of family leave policies – in isolation from other simultaneously operating variables – say, the socioeconomic status of those involved – the role of that particular variable is "conspicuously overestimated" (Magnussen, 1995, p. 46); that is, it may appear to have a predictive power far greater than is actually the case. In addition, variables of greater proximity to the individual in question (e.g., parent/child relationships) may appear (often erroneously) to be more influential than those that are farther removed from the immediate context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The role of the researcher itself is one such variable; even in studies in which the researcher is positioned as an objective observer, (s)he cannot help but affect the situation in some way.[1]

Rather, as Tudge and Hogan (2005) note, "What is needed is an approach to children's experience that is systematic, acknowledging the multi-directional synergistic aspects of numerous factors that combine to influence the ways in which children develop" (p. 102). This does not mean that every research study need take into account every potential variable – only that an ecological systems model discourages piecemeal approaches to complex phenomena. A given study may provide information about a limited segment of the whole system but, with that entirety in mind, the researcher will have a more accurate and realistic view of the role of a particular variable.

Ecological Systems Theory and Education

There is very little contemporary educational research that explicitly references ecological systems theory. Some studies make conceptual claims relevant to Bronfenbrenner's leveled systems, but offer no empirical data. An example of this form of research is Leu's (2008) paper describing early childhood education in Taiwan. Leu asserts that the quantity and quality of music instruction is influenced by factors ranging from parent-child relationships to the absence of music training for preschool teachers, but does not speak to the inter-relationship among subsystems.

Other studies focus on ways in which system elements impact individuals both directly and indirectly. Demi, Coleman-Jensen, and Snyder (2010) studied factors that affected post-secondary school enrollment rates in rural communities. They note that some exosystem factors such as parent education had a direct influence on students' educational choices, while other exosystem factors such as parent income tended to have an impact on school climate (possibly because the school environment in wealthier communities was more positive than that in poor communities) and that climate, in turn, affected college enrollment rates. At a somewhat greater level of sophistication, Lee's (2011) study of middle school bullying determined that certain factors were not only influential in and of themselves, but "circled around" to have a secondary impact. For example, Lee found that individual characteristics such as fun-seeking and aggression were more significant than environmental factors in predicting who would exhibit bullying behaviors; in addition, these personal qualities tended to influence peers who influenced the school climate which influenced, once again, the likelihood of bullying.

[1] An example of this phenomenon might be a researcher's decision to communicate to, or withhold from, a teacher information about observed students.

Ecological Systems Theory and Literacy Instruction

The most compelling study of literacy development using an explicit ecological systems theory lens is Connor, Son, Hindman, and Morrison's (2005) research examining first graders' growth in vocabulary and decoding skill. Employing a very complex design, Connor, et al. considered the effect of both proximal (e.g.,. teacher and child variables) and distal (e.g., socioeconomic status [SES] and past preschool experience) factors in children's reading progress. The most interesting aspect of this study was that certain factors which appeared to have limited explanatory power when only proximal factors were considered gained power when distal factors were taken into account. For example, prior to factoring in SES, teachers' years of experience did not seem to influence academic outcomes. However, when SES was included in the equation, there was a negative correlation between years of experience and literacy growth. Connor, et al., assert:

> The results of this study indicate that interventions focusing on only one aspect of the system of instruction, such as putting highly qualified teachers in classrooms, without considering the important influence of the entire system including classroom practices, SES, preschool and home, may not be wholly effective in improving children's literacy. (2005, p. 371)

This study offers clear and significant support for Bronfenbrenner's model. It suggests that we can only fully comprehend the significance of particular influences on literacy growth when we situate these influences in the broader context.

Ecological Systems Theory and Reading "Disability"

During the 1980's, there was a profusion of formal explanations for reading difficulty. Most focused exclusively on within-child factors. The so-called "Simple View" of reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986) asserts that reading difficulties are located in one of two areas – listening comprehension or decoding skill – or both. Likewise, Stanovich's (1980) interactive-compensatory and phonological core deficit (1988) models attend primarily to the struggling reader's direct and bounded relationship with the printed word.

However, two other models are of a very different ilk. Lipson & Wixson (2009) propose what they refer to as an interactive model. The authors claim that, whereas efforts to understand reading variability among skilled readers had begun to include an examination of a variety of factors, reading disability research remained mired in the hunt for within-the-reader pathology. They go on to cite examples of situations when outside-the-reader factors are at least as important. Among the many factors said to influence reading comprehension are: prior knowledge, text coherence, genre, means of assessment, level of setting formality, a past history of reading success or failure, and the quality of the "match" between the student's home culture and the culture of school. While Lipson & Wixson do not explicitly refer to Bronfenbrenner's systems model, the parallel is remarkable – covering all the sub-systems from micro to macro.

Bartoli (1990) suggests that reading problems typically occur when "one or more of the critical elements in the natural learning process . . . are missing in the ecology of the child" (p. 630). She asserts that the instructional implications of an ecological model of disability are very different from a more traditional view. In the latter, symptoms denote a problem within the child and so the logical approach is characterized by fragmented subskills teaching in a

segregated environment. In the former they denote an imbalance in the system and may be addressed by changing the nature of the teacher/child relationship, offering a more holistic curriculum, or investigating out-of-school factors (Bartoli & Botel, 1988).

In light of this evidence, how do we understand and meet the needs of vulnerable readers? Once again, Bronfenbrenner (1976) provides a clue. He states, "If you want to understand the relation between the learner and some aspect of his environment, try to budge the one and see what happens to the other" (p. 6). While I did not have the luxury of changing one factor at a time, this statement describes the essence of my research design. I facilitated changes in elements of the children's ecological system: texts, tasks, peer connections, etc., and, indirectly, cultivated change within the readers themselves and even in their family literacy dynamic.

Ecological Systems Theory and Vulnerable Readers

I have modified Bronfenbrenner's model to some degree. For example, I have altered the definitions of microsystem and mesosystem to more accurately represent the phenomenon I am attempting to capture (Figure 1). I use the term microsystem to refer to the connection between the vulnerable reader [Vul Reader] and one other element of the model (e.g., text *or* peers). All of these connections are transactional in nature. For example, both a vulnerable reader and a school-based adult [School Adult] (teacher or tutor) are changed in the process of their interaction.

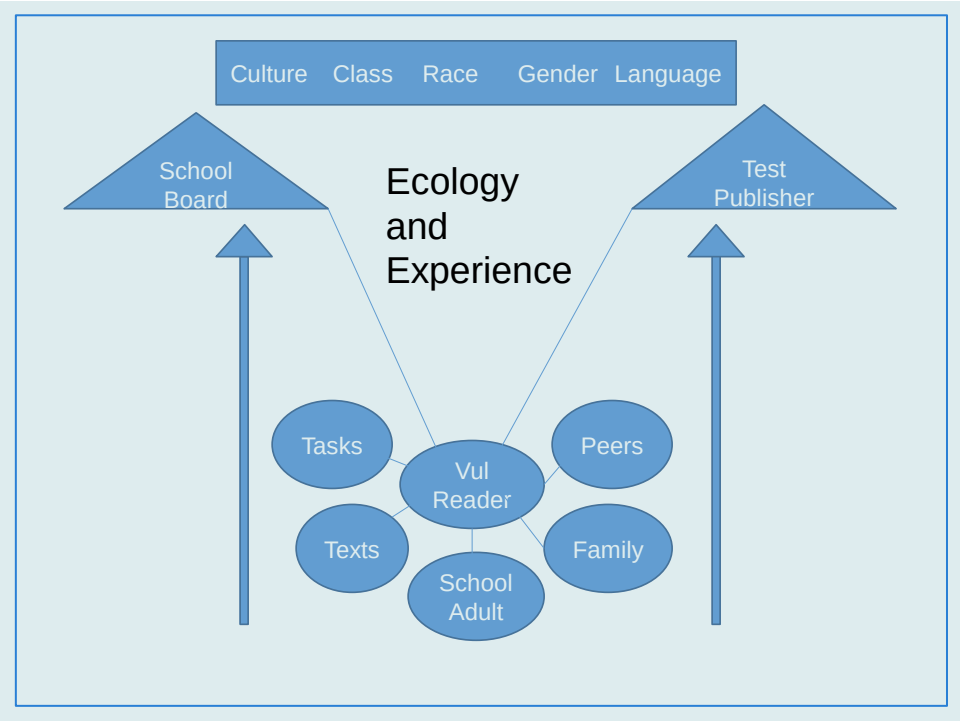

Figure 1: Ecological systems theory model for the literacy development of vulnerable readers

Mesosystems in my model are also somewhat different; they are sites where the vulnerable reader connects with two or more elements in the model (e.g., texts *and* peers). While connections among elements that do not specifically include the child (e.g., texts and tasks, or family members and the school board) are also of distinct interest, the primary focus of this dissertation is on relationships that involve the reader directly.

Other definitions are essentially identical to those offered by Bronfenbrenner. The chronosystem describes the connections between the immediate environment/individual child and the flow of time (e.g., the effect of long-term reading failure). Chronosystem impact is represented by arrows in Figure 1. Exosystems (triangles in Figure 1) are entities that have an impact on the vulnerable reader although (s)he doesn't interact with them directly (e.g., test publishers). Finally, the macrosystem, includes factors such as culture, class, race, gender, and language that pervade the vulnerable reader's literacy ecology.

Mesosystems are the primary focal areas of this study. Significant mesosystem sites include the following:

- Vulnerable reader/texts/tasks = site of reading (dis)ability (Lipson & Wixson, 2009).
- Vulnerable reader/texts/tasks/peers and/or family = site of reading (dis)ability, including relationships (McDermott, 1993).
- Vulnerable reader/texts/tasks/school-based adult = site of tutorial instruction.
- Vulnerable reader/texts/tasks/peers = site of small group instruction.

While the first two constructs defined above are abstractions, the latter two were the actual venues for my work with the children I served. I will describe these sites in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5. In brief, I attempted to create within the tutorial and small group sites what Winnicott (1965) terms a "holding environment" – that is an environment which provides both sufficient challenge and sufficient support enacted via caring relationships.

Vulnerable readers are, by definition, those who are most susceptible to disruptions in the ecological system. Many of the most significant threats to successful reading – and those to which this study most closely attends – are situated within the mesosystem sites. If, for example, the vulnerable reader is faced with too-difficult texts written by marginal authors, inauthentic tasks, a stressed teacher with limited time to interact with individual students, unsupportive peers, and high-stakes tests – a situation which is all-too-common in contemporary urban classrooms – the likelihood of success is very small. Add to this a macrosystem of oppressive class, race, and gender structures both within and outside of school, and the outlook is even bleaker.

Ecological Systems Theory and the 4th Grade Slump

My decision to work with 4th grade students was intentional. This is a key age for the emergence of vulnerable readers, the point at which the achievement of poor students begins to decline relative to their more affluent peers (Chall & Jacobs, 1983). A class-based phenomenon, therefore, becomes conflated with an academic phenomenon. Researchers have proposed any number of theories for the occurrence of the "4th grade slump" with recent efforts focused on text-based factors, particularly the lack of expository texts in the early elementary curriculum (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2009). But, as would be predicted from an ecological model, I suspect that this phenomenon is more complex than that – including such factors as differing reading tasks (the erroneous expectation that by the upper grades children

are “reading to learn” rather than “learning to read”) and changes in relationships with teachers, peers, and family.

In macrosystem terms, I believe there may be other equally valid reasons for this decline. We know that at this age children begin to juggle multiple streams of information and to compare them; they may, for example, understand that what they experience and what they are being told are two different things. They are more willing to challenge social norms (e.g., Macleod’s [2008] so-called “achievement ideology” – if you work hard you will succeed). They are beginning to form ideas about justice and fairness and judge hypocritical behavior harshly. What is more, an increase in the breadth and depth of their vocabulary offers them the language to process and describe what they see around them. From another developmental perspective, Erikson theorizes that the primary focus of children at this age is competence; they want to be successful and productive and are painfully aware when they are not (Berger, 2003). All these factors may result in a resistance to school – resistance which may result in lowered achievement.

For too long we have insisted on searching for the root of reading difficulties in the mind of the reader. It is important to consider what message this sends to someone who is already experiencing intense anxiety and frustration. We can say instead, “We know you are having difficulty but there are solutions to that difficulty that do not force you to surrender your identity as an intelligent person doing your best to cope within a complex ecosystem.” This is the message offered by Bronfenbrenner’s work.

Literature Review

There are three major bodies of knowledge that serve as the foundation for this study. I will begin with a review of the literature on what are commonly referred to as struggling readers, particularly those in grades three through eight. I will discuss the unhelpful struggling reader/reading disability dichotomy; socio-cultural and political positioning of this group; the instruction struggling readers typically receive; sub-typing within the struggling reader phenomenon; and implications for further research. Next I will present information on the most recent structural approach to supporting struggling readers, Response to Intervention (RTI). Areas covered include: foundational legislation; models and characteristics of RTI programs; evidence in support of RTI; and theoretical, practical, and research issues. Finally, I will look at the type of responsive instruction necessary to make RTI effective. I will compare the purpose and characteristics of culturally responsive instruction, differentiated instruction, and what I’ve chosen to call exploratory instruction.

Struggling Readers

Teachers, administrators, and researchers have employed a number of different terms to refer to children whose path to literacy is a bumpy one. They range from *word blind* (Morgan, 1896) to *at-risk, lagging, discrepant* (McMaster, Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2005) to the more contemporary *treatment resisters* (Torgesen, 2000), *nonresponders* (Daly, Martens, Barnett, Witt, & Olson, 2007), and *striving readers* (Fink, 2006). The term *remedial*, once used to refer to a type of instruction, is now commonly used to label those who need that instruction. For those who believe the old saw “a rose by any other name . . . ,”, several authors are quick to point out that changes in language alter perception (Johnston & Allington, 1991), that labels tend to persist (Triplett, 2007), and that the practice of labeling is not without

its psychological costs (Skrtic, 1991). If we think carefully about the connotations of some of these terms, it might give us pause. Nonresponder, for example, confuses the fact that a reader is not responding in the way we might hope with the idea that (s)he is exhibiting no response at all. Treatment resister implies that the reader is taking an active stance in opposition to learning when, more likely, the instructional process is simply not appropriate or effective. As explained earlier in this dissertation, my own preference is for the term vulnerable reader (Bomer, 1999) since it conveys the idea that these are readers who are most vulnerable to disruptions in their literacy milieu. Despite, the fact that *struggling reader* has its own baggage (Johnston & Allington, 1991), I will employ this term over the course of this literature review since it is the most commonly used at present.

Struggling reader/Learning disabled distinction. I have chosen not to differentiate between children who are labeled struggling readers (or any of the other terms noted above) and those who are designated as reading or learning disabled. While there are dissenters (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2002), it is now generally recognized that the use of an IQ/achievement discrepancy formula to differentiate children with learning disabilities from other struggling readers is inaccurate and unhelpful (Machek & Nelson, 2010; Siegel, 1989; Vellutino, Scanlon, & Lyon, 2000). Some argue against this procedure on equity grounds. As Stanonich (1999) states:

> [It] is rare for advocates of discrepancy-based definitions to articulate the theory of social justice that dictates that society has a special obligation to bring up the achievement of individuals whose achievement falls short of their IQs, rather than simply bring up the skills of those with low skills period. (1999, p. 353)

This view is supported by statistics that show that low SES students have lower average IQs and, when a discrepancy formula is used as the gateway to reading support, are less likely to receive the instruction they need (Fuchs, Mock, Morgan, & Young, 2003; Siegel, 1998).

Some suggest that IQ is, in fact, a meaningless construct (Poplin, 1984: Siegel, 1998); if discrepancy were more than a measurement anomaly (McEneany, Lose, & Schwartz, 2006), greater discrepancy should result in greater disability, but this is not the case (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). Since improved reading ability has been shown to increase IQ (Stanovich, 1991) – and resource room services tend to decrease it (Bentum & Aaron, 2003) – children designated as learning disabled may, in fact, see their discrepancy fade over time; those who do not receive these services may demonstrate such a discrepancy at a later date if their reading improves a little and their IQ increases significantly.

In addition, there is no clear differentiation between struggling readers with lower and higher IQs. In fact, there is a near complete overlap on all measures – including self-concept as well as achievement – between children designated as learning disabled and those who are not (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Shin, & McGue, 1982). In addition, they exhibit the same range of problems (Elliott & Gibbs, 2008; Siegel, 1992; Siegel, 1998; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003) and the two groups are, themselves, heterogeneous (Poplin, 1984). When provided with the same support, the response of readers who show little to no discrepancy between IQ and achievement is similar to (Aaron, 1997; Elliott & Gibbs, 2008; Vaughn, Gersten, & Chard, 2000; Vellutino, et al., 2000) or greater than (Siegel, 1998) that of readers with higher IQs.

The use of discrepancy formulas has instructional implications as well. The time typically required in order to prove discrepancy sets up a "wait to fail" dynamic (Fuchs, et al.,

2003) since early intervention is all but out of the question. Despite their presumed objectivity (Skrtic, 1991), assessments used to differentiate between the two types of readers are unlike real-life tasks (Dean, Burns, Grialou, & Varro, 2006) and not helpful diagnostically (Aaron, 1997; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). A child may receive a learning disability designation, yet the educator assigned to serve this child may have no information about how best to serve her/him.

There are other schemes for differentiating learning disabled from other struggling readers. These, too, have been largely discredited. Hale, et al. (2010) state that a "pattern of processing strengths and weaknesses" (p. 22) can be used to determine which children have learning disabilities. Others suggest that a pattern of low achievement and low progress – termed a "dual discrepancy" – is the most accurate determinant (Hunley & McNamara, 2010; Speece & Case, 2001; Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003), but it is not fully clear what rate of progress is meant here. Paulesu, et al. (2001) continue to insist on a neurological difference as the basis for learning disabilities, but brain scans have been unable to distinguish them (Elliott & Gibbs, 2008).

A host of problems remain with all efforts to differentiate those who are supposedly learning disabled from those who are not. One such problem is the sense of deficit thinking that accompanies efforts to find the root of difficulties within the learner (Dean, Burns, Grialou, & Varro, 2006; Skrtic, 1991) and the "medicalizing" of these difficulties. Sociocultural and macrostructural factors are at least as important as internal ones (Bryan, 2003; Dressman, Wilder, & Connor, 2005). In a nutshell, *learning disability* is a social construct (Reid & Valle, 2004) and, in truth, we have at-risk contexts rather than at-risk children (Sanacore, 1994). In an effort to simplify what is, in fact, a very complex issue, the socio-cultural context – the environment that manufactures disability – is ignored. In the words of McEneaney, Lose, & Schwartz, (2006), the attempt to craft a clinical problem from a societal one produces "a case of beautiful theory and ugly facts" (p. 199).

Struggling readers and the socio-political context. Even if we agree to abandon the disabled/nondisabled reader distinction, the existence of struggling readers seems to serve a function in the socio-political context of schools. We seem to feel the need to classify children (McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006), and failure, like disability, seems to be an institutional construct (McIntyre, 2010). Early school failure may, in fact, "cause" reading problems because it disrupts the child's natural ability to learn effectively (Stanovich, 1986) and sets up a vicious cycle of failure, risk avoidance, discomfort, withdrawal, and further failure (Henson & Gilles, 2003). Of course, it is particular individuals who position some children as struggling readers (Collins, 2011; Enriquez, 2011; Moller, 2004), including parents, peers, teachers, and other school personnel (Grigorenko, 2010). Suspect as well are test and textbook publishers who profit from selling assessments and curricula designed to address their needs. As Shannon & Edmondson (2010) note, the struggling reader phenomenon may so pervade educational discourse that "the power of DIBELS [and other isolated skills products] becomes invisible and natural, local administrators make policies, teachers label students, parents worry about their children, and readers are made and unmade accordingly" (p. 4). When given half a chance, we presume incompetence at every turn (Biklen & Burke, 2006).

Instruction for struggling readers. Classroom-based research conducted during the 1980's taught us a lot about the instruction of struggling readers. Despite the fact that these

students have been shown to be as capable of higher level thinking as their more successful peers (Sanacore, 1994), the teaching they receive is quite different. Their instruction is characterized by a greater proportion of rote drill (Rasinski & Padak, 2000); consequently, there is less emphasis on meaning. They are also more frequently interrupted as they read (Allington, 1983). Largely because they are required to read aloud most of the time, they read far fewer words per day than average and above average readers (Allington, 1977); since reading volume contributes extensively to vocabulary development (Nagy, Anderson, & Herman, 1987), this has implications for both reading success and content knowledge. These students are also more likely to be pulled out of their classroom for "remedial" instruction despite the fact that they are the least able to deal with the instructional disruption that results (Woodward & Talbert-Johnson, 2009).

Lest it be argued that significant changes have occurred since this research was conducted, Poole's 2008 study of heterogeneous grouping confirmed that weaker readers within these groups read less and were interrupted more. Should it be suggested that struggling readers are somehow not capable of benefitting from richer instructional practices, Denton and Mathes (2003) found that these children made as much progress in classrooms characterized by extensive reading experiences with leveled texts as they did in structured, sequenced programs utilizing decodable texts. They do not need isolated skill instruction, controlled texts, static ability grouping, and lots of oral reading (Reutzel & Smith, 2004) and their progress is undermined by arbitrary tasks and a competitive culture of shame (McDermott, 1993).

We know as much about reading instruction that benefits these readers as we do about that which serves to inhibit their growth. Struggling readers need rich, comprehensive programs (Spear-Swerling, 2010). They need scaffolded strategy instruction, curriculum integration, discussion with peers, a print-rich environment, daily writing, and individual attention (Reutzel & Smith, 2004). They benefit from the opportunity to choose what and how they read (Primeaux, 2000; Triplett, 2004), assessment using performance tasks (Primeaux, 2000), and celebration of their successes (Triplett, 2004). When they need specific intervention services in order to catch up with their peers, they require the strongest teachers and the highest quality programs (Neal & Kelly, 2002).

Older and late-identified struggling readers. I am particularly interested in struggling readers between the ages of eight and twelve. Frequently termed the "fourth grade slump" phenomenon, it is at this age that the achievement of lower SES students begins to fall below that of their more affluent peers. Knowledge of word meanings decelerates at this time, word recognition and spelling a bit later, followed by oral and silent reading. This drop-off begins even earlier for children whose achievement was low in second grade (Chall & Jacobs, 1983; Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990). Creative thinking diminishes at this time, as does school-based self-concept (Williams, 1976). Some suggest that this decline is caused by the higher level of sophistication of school tasks and changes in assessment demands (Moss, 2005). Others attribute it to the expectation that more reading will be done silently (Goodman, personal communication, 2010) or to the increase in reading of expository texts (Moss, 2005), despite a lack of such texts within classroom libraries (Jeong, Gaffney, & Choi,2010).

Children who have struggled with literacy beginning in the primary grades and continue to do so are joined by an additional group of children – commonly termed "late-identified" struggling readers – who have been relatively successful early on and are only now exhibiting reading difficulties (Wanzek, et al., 2010). This label applies to about 45% of struggling readers in this age group and many of the late-identified group exhibit profiles distinctly different from those identified at earlier ages. While only 6% of the early-identified group had difficulties related primarily to comprehension, this was the predominant problem for nearly a third of readers who were successful until fourth grade (Leach, Scarborough, & Rescorla, 2003). The two groups also tend to have disparate needs; comprehension- and vocabulary-related interventions generally had larger effect sizes for late-identified students than for those who struggled from an early age (Wanzek, et al., 2010).

As is true of struggling readers as a whole, we know a great deal about what works for those who begin to have literacy difficulties later in life – about the texts and tasks that best serve them as well as practices that address affective and social concerns. It is widely acknowledged that older readers need to read a variety of engaging texts and that they need to have considerable control over text selection, and time to read independently (Biancarosa, 2005; Chall, et al., 1990; Ivey & Baker, 2004; Roberts, Torgesen, Boardman, & Scammacca, 2008; Schifini, 1999). They also benefit from participating in a range of reading-related activities such as those listed below:

- Contextualized word study with an emphasis on flexible decoding strategies (Ivey & Baker, 2004; Roberts, et al., 2008);
- Comprehension strategy instruction, including the use of think aloud to support sense-making (Biancarosa, 2005; Ivey & Baker, 2004; Roberts, et al., 2008);
- Development of academic vocabulary (Chall, et al., 1990);
- Responding to what is read (Schifini, 1999); and
- Goal-setting in collaboration with teachers who provide specific feedback on student progress and other formative assessments (Biancarosa, 2005).

Ideally, these activities occur in small groups and/or one-on-one, in addition to whole-class instruction (Biancarosa, 2005; Ivey & Baker, 2004; Chall, et al.,1990; Schifini, 1999).

Whether these students have a history of difficulty or are confronting literacy problems after several years of success, affective and social factors are of great significance. Non-academic factors, such as impulsivity and low school-related self-esteem may play an important role (Gaskins, 1984) and they may exhibit increasing difficulty in engaging deeply with text (Purcell-Gates, 1990). Older struggling readers are very concerned about their peers' reaction to any evidence of academic weakness and their desire to impress their friends and to avoid humiliation may take precedence over the work they need to do in order to improve (Hall, 2010; Henson & Gilles, 2003; McDermott, 1993). In some cases, if their peer group is similarly disengaged, they may avoid reading altogether; to read may be to accept the teacher's "game" – not to read, the peers' game (McDermott, 1985). In this context, the older struggling reader needs a caring, committed adult (Worthy, Patterson, Salas, Prater, & Turner, 2002).

Subgroups of struggling readers. While there are dissenters (Kamhi, 2008; Stanovich, 1986), it is now commonly agreed that struggling readers exhibit a variety of different profiles, that these profiles are not evident by viewing standardized test results (Buly & Valencia, 2002;

Rupp & Lesaux, 2006), and that readers' challenges and needs differ (Bomer, 1999). This is true in phonetically regular languages such as Finnish (Torppa, et al., 2007) and Swedish (Wolff, 2010), as well as in more orthographically complex languages like English. There is, however, considerable disagreement about what sub-typing scheme best describes the struggling reader phenomenon (Kavale & Forness, 1987).

Over the years, ideas about reader sub-groups have evolved. Early frameworks include the following:

- Readers with phonological issues vs. those with rapid-naming issues vs. those demonstrating both problems (Wolff, 2010);
- Readers with high vs. low IQ (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2002); and
- Readers with weak word recognition vs. weak listening comprehension vs. "garden-variety readers" who struggle with both (Gough & Tunmer, 1986; Stanovich, 1988); some believe these readers fall along a continuum rather than in distinct groups (Catts, Hogan, & Fey, 2003)

Recent schemes offer a more subtle view, differentiating among readers with decoding vs. fluency vs. meaning issues (Aaron, Joshi, & Williams, 1999; Buly & Valencia, 2002) or those who struggle with particular types of text such as documents (Wolff, 2010). There are also a range of sub-groupings within, for example, the poor comprehender type; these will be discussed farther along in this review.

The work of Spear-Swerling (2010), as well as my own experience has led me to a somewhat different sub-typing structure (see Figure 2). While Buly and Valencia (2002) and Aaron, et al. (1999) have chosen to emphasize differences between struggling readers with weak word recognition skills vs. weak fluency, they haven't distinguished between children with low reading comprehension (presumably due to inadequate strategy knowledge and use, or poor listening comprehension) and those with limited vocabulary. I have found these to be salient features and have combined fluency with word recognition because the great majority of readers with whom I've worked – including those I studied in my dissertation research – struggled with both or with neither.

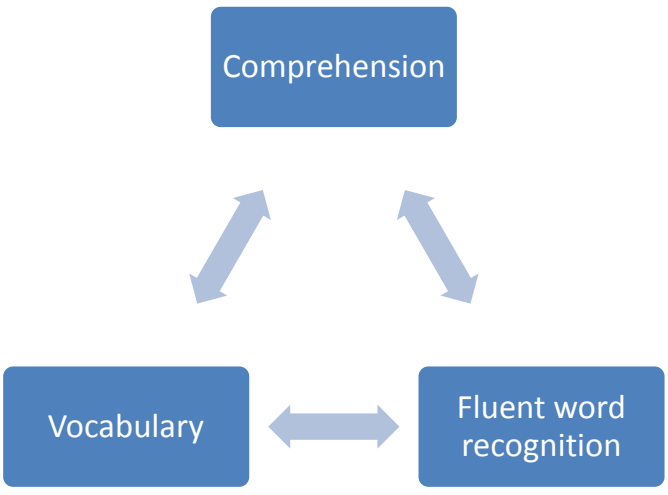

Figure 2: Interaction of factors for vulnerable reader subtyping

Of course, efforts to establish homogeneous groups of struggling readers can lead to oversimplification. There is clear evidence that, within the aspects of reading presented in Figure 2, there are strong, reciprocal relationships. Many research studies have found a unidirectional effect of vocabulary knowledge on comprehension (Nelson & Stage, 2007; Ouellette & Beers, 2010; Ricketts, Nation, & Bishop, 2007; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986); if one does not understand the meanings of large numbers of words in a passage, it is unlikely that full comprehension will occur. Others suggest, however, that the impact is bi-directional – that strong comprehenders also increase their vocabulary knowledge since they are more motivated to read extensively (Nation, 2009; Stanovich, 1986; Taboada & Rutherford, 2011). Obviously recognition of most words in a text is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition for comprehension, but there is also research support for the idea that comprehension ability affects word recognition (Cohen, 1983); low levels of comprehension tend to discourage readers, thereby limiting print exposure and diminishing word recognition skills. By the late elementary years, reading becomes a major source of vocabulary development (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2001) and an inability to recognize words inhibits this growth. But the reverse is also true – readers with limited vocabularies have a narrower range of words to which approximate decoding can refer (Chall, et al., 1990; Ouellette & Beers, 2010; Spear-Swerling, 2010). Nevertheless, readers are frequently able to compensate for difficulties in a particular area; weak decoders may be able to employ their considerable intellect to understand passages that appear to be at their frustrational level, while other readers may fail to understand texts they can fluently decode (Walczyk & Griffith-Ross, 2007).

Buly and Valencia (2002) assert that, while it is important to understand the variation among struggling readers, awareness does not take us far enough. The primary purpose of their study was to dispute the notion that we can treat all struggling readers the same (generally speaking, by providing phonics instruction for all) and expect them to be successful. Clearly, we need to differentiate the support they receive according to the particular challenges they exhibit (Dressman, et al., 2005; Gaskins, 1984). This may take the form of flexible grouping based on need (Dennis, 2009/2010), should emphasize students' strengths as well as challenges (Lee & Neal, 1993), and should take into account struggling readers' own perceptions of what they need as well as our own (Henson & Gilles, 2003).

What do we know about children who struggle specifically with word recognition, with vocabulary knowledge, or with comprehension, and what can we do to support them? The following sections speak to each type of struggling reader in turn, considering sub-type definitions, ideas about causation, and instructional needs.

Dyslexics/Poor decoders. While the phrase *poor decoders* comes up occasionally in the research literature, *dyslexic* is the more common word, and clinical terminology permeates discussions of this type of reader. The first article I could find using the term dyslexia in the title was a 1946 piece by Schmieding, and an early description of a child exhibiting dyslexic symptoms appears in a conference paper by Jansky (1957). Fletcher & Lyon (2008) believe it is crucial to precisely define the term dyslexia, while others, Elliott and Gibbs (2008) among them, worry that efforts to do so may exclude from support services many children who could benefit from help. The International Dyslexia Society (2002) has defined the condition as follows:

> Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities . . . Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.

Approximately 35% of poor elementary readers can be said to fall into this group (Catts, et al., 2003).

But efforts to corral children to whom this term has been applied into a single, homogeneous group have proven problematic. Everatt, Weeks, and Brooks (2008) note that no one area of deficit distinguishes dyslexics from other struggling readers. Elliott & Gibbs (2008) assert that the list of co-morbid characteristics that may accompany dyslexia is so long as to render the term virtually meaningless; they include:

> speech and language difficulties, poor short-term (or working) memory, difficulties in ordering and sequencing, clumsiness, a poor sense of rhythm, limited speed of information processing, poor concentration, inconsistent hand preference, poor verbal fluency, poor phonic skills, frequent use of letter reversals (d for b, for example), a difficulty in understanding mental calculations, low self-image, and anxiety when asked to read aloud (2008, p. 477).

Furthermore, as is true of struggling readers as a whole, readers designated as dyslexic may fall into a variety of subgroups (Vellutino & Fletcher, 2005). In an early iteration of sub-grouping, Aaron, Grantham, & Campbell (1982) distinguish between dysphonetics and dyseidetics (those with auditory vs. visual difficulties). Morris, et al. (1998) suggest that such readers may be characterized as having one of five major profiles: global deficit (overall weaknesses), global language (somewhat stronger at visual tasks), phonological rate (auditory difficulties with low rapid-naming scores), phonological spatial (with high rapid-naming), or phonological lexical (with high rapid-naming and visual results). Strauss (2010) differentiates among three subtypes: phonological dyslexics (those who have difficulty reading phonologically-regular nonsense words), surface dyslexics (who pronounce words as they appear, reading, for example, /iz-land/ for *island*), and deep dyslexics (who substitute semantically-similar terms such as *shut* for *close*). Spear-Swerling (2010) suggests that late-emerging dyslexics have different profiles than those whose difficulties are detected earlier; while they may exhibit little trouble with basic decoding tasks, they are more likely to struggle with multi-syllable words or technical terms for which they have no clear referent.

Given definitional challenges, it is no surprise that there are significant disagreements about causality. It is generally agreed that dyslexia is not caused by brain damage (Williams & Lynch, 2010). The condition is widely assumed to have a genetic component since dyslexics frequently have parents and siblings with reading difficulties (Scarborough, 1991). The International Dyslexia Society's definition states that it is neurological in origin, and yet neuro-imaging studies have not proven useful for making decisions about differential instruction (Elliott & Gibbs, 2008; Strauss, 2010). There is wide support for the notion that dyslexia is associated with, if not caused by, alphabetic coding deficits (Invernizzi & Hayes, 2010; Vellutino, Fletcher, Snowling, & Scanlon, 2004); others posit a stronger connection to syntactic and semantic issues (Hagtvet, 2003), suggesting that word-finding fluency difficulties may play a

role since the struggling readers with whom they worked were more effective silent than oral readers (German & Newman, 2007). Gaskins, Ehri, Cress, O'Hara, and Donnelly (1996/1997) associate word recognition difficulties with personality characteristics such as impulsivity and anxiety. Of all the articles I read, only one (Poole, 2010), suggested that ecological factors (from nutrition to the quality of the home reading environment) might play a role.

How can we assist readers who have word recognition-related challenges, whether or not they have a dyslexia diagnosis? Most researchers in this field have a behaviorist bias and a background in special education, so the most typical recommendations involve a systematically-sequenced subskills approach (National Institute of Child Health and Development, 1999). Others suggest a continuum of instructional strategies tailored to a stage-theory scheme including an emphasis on context, phonemic awareness and letter-by-letter decoding, analogical decoding, and sight recognition (Gaskins, 2004; Gaskins, et al., 1996/1997). Computer-based learning has proved successful in some contexts (Torgesen, Wagner, Rashotte, Herron, & Lindamood, 2010) and, with the renewed emphasis on reading problems generated by the No Child Left Behind Act and supported by Reading First funding, even long-discredited programs and products like DISTAR have re-emerged in new forms such as *Reading Mastery* (Camp & Aldridge, 2007). If we hoped to understand the role of teacher-student relationships in supporting readers with word recognition problems, however, it is not to be found in the dyslexia literature.

Readers with limited vocabularies. Whereas poor word recognition skills are connected in the literature with the clinical condition of dyslexia, vocabulary limitations are frequently associated with English learners struggling to expand their knowledge of word meanings in a new language (Carlo, et al., 2004; Manyak, 2010; Manyak & Bower, 2009; Sibold, 2011; Taboada & Rutherford, 2011; Wallace, 2007). While research on this topic suffers none of the definitional angst that characterizes the dyslexia debate, the connection between a reader's vocabulary base and general reading achievement is not entirely clear (Mezynski, 1983) and efforts to measure growth in vocabulary have proven difficult (Katz & Carlisle, 2009).

While knowledge of word meanings most certainly influences reading success (Ricketts, et al., 2007; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986) and this relationship increases over time (Tannenbaum, Torgesen, & Wagner, 2006) the connection is not a simple one; full vocabulary knowledge may not produce comprehension and, on the flip side, comprehension can occur even if not all word meanings are known (Mezynski, 1983). Tannenbaum, et al. suggest that it is, in fact, vocabulary fluency (the rate at which an individual can access word meanings) that is the more crucial factor. Harmon, Hedrick, and Wood (2005) differentiate between vocabulary breadth (the sheer number of meanings known) and vocabulary depth (the fullness of word understanding, in all its variation); while these constructs were less helpful in predicting decoding and comprehension among first graders, vocabulary breadth contributed to the variance of reading comprehension at sixth grade and both breadth and depth affected decoding. Efforts to increase vocabulary knowledge hold some promise; for example, a vocabulary-based intervention was found to be effective with eight-year-olds who had not responded to phonologically-oriented intervention (Duff, et al., 2008).

In addition to the developmental limitations on vocabulary knowledge caused by difficulties in mastering a new language, researchers have posited several other reasons for

word meaning challenges. Most well-known is a 1995 study by Hart and Risley who purport to demonstrate that children from low SES households begin school at a disadvantage due to limited language exposure in their pre-school years. This study has been largely discredited on both socio-cultural and methodological grounds (Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009). A more plausible and productive explanation lies in differential exposure to text. This may be particularly true of English learners; as Wallace (2007) suggests, "ELLs need sufficient vocabulary in order to read effectively, while at the same time, extensive reading is a necessary component for acquiring a sufficient vocabulary" (p. 189). Even if struggling readers read the same amount as their higher-achieving peers, they may absorb fewer new word meanings because the texts they read are written at a lower level and are, therefore, less likely to broaden their vocabulary base.

How can we assist readers who have vocabulary-related challenges, whether or not they are English learners? Recommendations generally fall into one or both of two categories: support for incidental word learning and direct instruction of specific word meanings. Some researchers suggest that most word meanings are derived from reading of extended text (Nagy, et al., 1987) and that the ability to learn words in this way increases with age; therefore, providing opportunities for wide reading is the best course of action (Swanborn & deGlopper, 1999). This plan of attack is supported by Taboada & Rutherford's 2011 study demonstrating that words learned incidentally have a greater positive impact on comprehension than do those directly taught. Explicit teaching of word-learning strategies is also beneficial (Hairrell, Rupley, & Simmons, 2011; Jitendra, Edwards, Sacks, & Jacobson, 2004; Manyak, 2010). This may involve helping students to use the semantic context to figure out word meanings (Hairrell, et al., 2011; Nash & Snowling, 2006), with opportunities to practice as important as explanation (Kuhn & Stahl, 1998), and use of morphological approaches (Ebbers & Denton, 2008).

Others recommend direct instruction of specific words as the most effective strategy. Choosing words of the so-called Tier2 classification – that is, academically-oriented, but widely applicable (Manyak, 2010), multi-meaning words (Nelson & Stage, 2007) and words that students themselves find interesting and useful (Nelson & Stage, 2007) seems to be most effective. Drill should be avoided but repeated and varied exposure to such words appears to be a crucial factor (Hairrell, et al., 2011; Harmon, Hedrick, & Wood, 2005; Jitendra, et al., 2004; Lawrence, White, & Snow, 2010).

As might be expected, the most productive vocabulary-expanding instruction includes a wide range of activities. Taboada & Rutherford's 2011 study of English learners produced gains in both vocabulary and comprehension by employing both explicit instruction in word meanings and opportunities for incidental word learning. Similarly, Manyak (2010) found that a multi-faceted comprehensive approach including everything from the use of visual images to teach specific Tier 2 words to activities intended to foster word consciousness were beneficial. Long-term interventions were more effective than those of shorter duration (Manyak & Bower, 2009). Carlo, et al. (2004) formed collaborative groups including both English learner and English-only members and this had a positive effect on vocabulary and comprehension for both groups.

Poor comprehenders. The construct of the *poor comprehender* is less closely associated with a clinical condition or with a particular group of children than is the case with poor

decoders or children with vocabulary limitations. While there has, historically, been a greater interest in children with word recognition problems (Cornoldi & Oakhill, 1996) this seems to be changing; using the phrase *poor comprehenders* as a search term generates far more studies than the terms *poor decoder* and *poor vocabulary* combined. Allington & McGill-Franzen (2009) suggests that there are, in fact, more poor comprehenders with strong decoding than the reverse; yet resource room and compensatory reading programs tend to address this issue only minimally.

There *is* a clinical condition, hyperlexia, associated with poor comprehension. Hyperlexia was first described by Parker in 1917 and the term was first used in 1968 (Silberberg & Silberberg). While some researchers (Catts, et al., 2003) employ the term more broadly – suggesting that as many as 15% of poor elementary readers are hyperlexic – the word is more commonly used to describe a rare neurological dysfunction found in about 1 in every 100,000 children (Worthy & Invernizzi, 1995). Hyperlexics are characterized by precocious word recognition skills but expressionless oral reading (Healy, Aram, Horwitz, & Kessler, 1982; Silberberg & Silberberg, 1968/1969), low verbal skills (Healy, et al., 1982), weak vocabulary (Healy, et al., 1982; Nation, 1999), perseverative re-reading (Silberberg & Silberberg, 1968/1969), and a tendency to focus on very small units of meaning (Snowling & Frith, 1986). They may also exhibit odd behavioral characteristics such as hand-flapping, spinning, or rocking (Healy, et al., 1982). While some researchers suggest that hyperlexics populate the full range of intelligence levels (Silberberg & Silberberg, 1968/1969), others insist that they are, by definition, developmentally delayed (Grigorenko, Klin, & Volkmar, 2003), mentally retarded (Snowling & Frith, 1986), and/or on the autistic spectrum (Nation, 1999). Worthy and Invernizzi (1995) recommend that interventions for hyperlexics include language therapy via Language Experience approach; reading materials with strong connections to the reader's individual interests; and comprehension and word-learning strategy instruction including think alouds, graphic organizers, and meaningful writing activities. Murdick, Garten, and Rao (2004) suggest that pre-teaching vocabulary, providing concrete examples, and developing social skills are also beneficial.

While there is certainly something to be learned from the literature on hyperlexia, most poor comprehenders do not exhibit such debilitating symptoms. In this less-extreme form, poor comprehenders are estimated to make up anywhere from 10% of the general population by 5th grade (Meisinger, Schwanenflugel, Bradley, Kuhn, & Morris, 2009) to 2-4.5% of readers with normal intelligence (Cornoldi & Oakhill, 1996) to a third of fluent decoders in the 2nd-10th grade range (Applegate, Applegate, & Modla, 2009). English learners who have difficulty with understanding text are not clearly different from English-only readers (Lesaux & Kieffer, 2010). Poor comprehenders are said to fall along a continuum from those who read with fluency and expression to those who are less fluent but have no decoding issues to those whose comprehension is simply lower than their word recognition (Cornoldi & Oakhill, 1996).

Poor comprehenders exhibit a range of difficulties. They tend to have weak listening comprehension (Nation, 2005; Oakhill & Garnham, 1988) and working (although not short-term) memory issues (Cain, Oakhill, & Bryant, 2004; Carretti, Borella, Cornoldi, & DeBeni, 2009; Eason & Cutting, 2009), particularly of complex sentences (Cain & Oakhill, 2009). However, as is true with poor decoders/dyslexics, a number of researchers have suggested that poor

comprehenders are not a homogeneous group and that no single fundamental weakness differentiates these readers from others who struggle (Cain & Oakhill, 2006; Floyd, Bergeron & Alfonso, 2006).

Several researchers have offered subtype profiles that describe the variation among these readers. Spiro (1979) offers two such schemes. He differentiates between readers who have inadequate schema and prior knowledge and those who appear to read one sentence at a time – those who "understand individual sentences but fail to integrate information across sentences" (p. 9); Gibson and Levin (1975) and Spiro (1979) note that the latter readers are unable to hold the Big Picture in mind. From another angle, Spiro (1979) distinguishes between those readers whose comprehension is diminished by an over-reliance on bottom-up strategies for decoding and those who attend primarily to top-down clues; this classification is confirmed by van den Broek, White, Kendeou, & Carlson (2009). Coots & Snow (1980), emphasize the significance of hyper-dependence on bottom-up processes. Others suggest that some poor comprehenders are inclined to attend too strongly to schema built early in the text (Stanovich, West, Cunningham, Cipielewski, & Siddiqui, 1996) or from their own experience (Sullivan, 1978) at the expense of new information. Bowyer-Crane and Snowling (2005) suggest that while some poor comprehenders struggle with understanding on all levels, others are able to gain literal meaning but not to infer or think at a higher level about text. Cain, Oakhill, & Lemmon (2004) propose yet another dichotomy, dividing poor comprehenders into those who also have limited vocabulary knowledge and those whose difficulties are a result of weak strategy use; Cramer (1970) agrees. All of these researchers either state or imply that readers with differing profiles require different interventions.

Descriptions of readers who struggle to comprehend include a wide range of common characteristics. Many such readers have issues with schema. Of these, some suffer from an absence of relevant schema, their prior knowledge is too specific for the particular reading context, or they are unsure which of the schema they have are applicable to the situation (Spiro, 1980). In other cases the appropriate schema are not readily and effortlessly accessible, they have difficulty maintaining awareness of schema across the length of the text, or they fail to combine apparently disparate knowledge into a comprehensive whole. Some readers simply have trouble applying fully adequate real-world knowledge to the task at hand (Bowyer-Crane & Snowling, 2005).

Other poor comprehenders struggle with syntactic complexity. They have difficulty processing anaphora, especially pronoun referents (Cain & Oakhill, 2009; Ehrlich, 1996); struggle to understand the relationship between multiple sentence parts linked with connectors like *because* (Cain & Oakhill, 2009); and are challenged by relatively uncommon sentence structures such as passive voice (Nation & Snowling, 2000). Evidence for this difficulty is found in eye movement studies which demonstrate that poor comprehenders fixate more frequently than their better-comprehending peers (Golinkoff, 1975/1976), very possibly in an effort to deal with unfamiliar syntactic structures.

Issues with so-called executive function also characterize readers who struggle to understand text (Locascio, Mahone, Eason, & Cutting, 2010). More so than poor decoders, these readers have difficulty planning and organizing the use of comprehension strategies, even if they have learned them (Eason & Cutting, 2009). For example, they rarely look back into the

text when they are confused (Grigorenko, Klin, & Volkmar, 2003). Despite the fact that poor comprehenders report use of these strategies, especially those they believe they "should" employ, they do not demonstrate such use while reading (Garner, Wagner, & Smith, 1983). Strategies that present particular problems are self-monitoring, inferring, and distinguishing more from less important information.

Most researchers note that poor comprehenders have difficulty noticing their own lack of understanding at both the word and text levels (Oakhill, Hartt, & Samols, 2005). In altered text, they demonstrate less awareness of semantic and syntactic violations (Miller & Isakson, 1976). In authentic text, they have a low rate of self-correction (Weber, 1970) and miscues which violate meaning are corrected less frequently than those which are grapho-phonically different from the correct word (Fleisher, 1990); this, of course, undermines meaning. These readers are also relatively unaware of confusion caused by broader aspects of reading. Simply put, they often do not understand that they do not understand (Bomer, 1999; Cain, Oakhill, & Elbro, 2003; Garner, 1982; Garner, et al., 1983). While they are relatively effective at detecting inconsistencies between their prior knowledge and text information, they typically do not notice inconsistencies from one sentence of text to another (Reis & Spekman, 1983); this is particularly true if these inconsistencies cross large segments of text (Nation, 2005). Oakhill & Garnham (1988) argue that they are unaware of these discrepancies because they don't expect text to make sense. Difficulties with self-monitoring are exacerbated when the reader has considerable prior knowledge to bring to the text; they are likely to ignore new information in service of maintaining their original schema (Ehrlich, 1996).

As is true with self-monitoring, poor comprehenders demonstrate inferential thinking difficulties at both the word and text levels. They have trouble using context to infer word meanings (Cain, et al., 2003; Oakhill & Garnham, 1988; Oakhill & Yuill, 1996). This is largely a result of their inability to retain context over time (Ricketts, Bishop, & Nation, 2008). For this reason, context clues that precede the word in question are more helpful to them than ensuing context (van der Shoot, Vasbinder, Horsley, Reijntjes, & van Lieshout, 2009). Similarly, making inferences across text is problematic (Cain, et al., 2003; Ehrlich, 1996; Oakhill & Yuill, 1996), especially when key information is separated by intervening sentences (Oakhill & Garnham, 1988).

Distinguishing more from less important information is also a challenge for poor comprehenders (Borella, Carretti, & Pelegrina, 2010) who often confuse details with main ideas (Cain & Oakhill, 2009; Ehrlich, 1996). This seems to be due to the fact that these readers have difficulty eliminating irrelevant detail (Carretti, Cornoldi, DeBeni, & Romano, 2005); they tend to treat each individual piece of information or even each word as a meaningful unit unto itself with no particular segment of text demonstrating more importance than any other (Lumbelli, 1996; Oakhill & Garmston, 1988). In addition, they have trouble using a sense of story grammar to structure their retellings (Ehrlich, 1996). Oakhill and Yuill (1996) found that, when asked to tell a story based on a series of pictures, poor comprehenders described each picture in isolation and tended to speak in such a way that the listener was unable to follow the story without the pictures present.

Poor comprehenders hold unproductive beliefs about what it means to be a good reader. They typically believe that decoding skill is more important than making sense of what

they read (Oakhill & Garmston, 1988). When given a text that was both informationally inconsistent and contained a number of multi-syllable modifiers and asked to comment on what proved challenging to them, they were much more likely to focus on long words (Garner, 1981). Parker, Hasbrouck, and Denton (2002) effectively summarize the difficulties faced by poor comprehenders, noting that they struggle with key words, key sentences, relationships among sentences, text organization, and an inability to maintain concentration.

Researchers suggest a range of causes for poor comprehension, ranging from internal to contextual and experiential factors. Since it appears that these readers struggle with verbal reasoning more generally, it is likely that this contributes to difficulties (Cain & Oakhill, 2006) and problems with working memory also play a role (Carretti, Borella, Cornoldi, & DeBeni, 2009). It has been suggested, however, that poor comprehenders tend to have less reading and reading-related experiences (Nation, 2005), including library visits (Oakhill & Yuill, 1996). Poor instruction, particularly that which overemphasizes decoding and fluency is also implicated (Curtis, 1980; Meisinger, et al., 2009; Spiro, 1980). Many poor comprehenders who have a long history of reading failure attribute such failure to inside-reader forces, while any successes they experience are presumed to be caused by luck; this reinforces their self-image as poor readers (Borkowski, Weyhing, & Carr, 1988).

How can we assist readers who have trouble understanding text? We know a good deal about the content of instruction they need, the texts they should read, and the way teachers can best support them. In terms of content, the clearest message in the research literature is that strategy instruction is a must. It appears to be more "trainable" that inferential thinking, background knowledge, or working memory (Johnson-Glenberg, 2000) and more transferable than academic content (Dole, Brown, & Trathen, 1996). Researchers differ in their recommendations for what strategies are most useful; I've listed them below in order beginning with those that appear most frequently in the literature:

- Visualize (Center, Freeman, Robertson, & Outhred, 1999; Chan, Cole, & Morris, 1990; Lanning, 2009; Oakhill & Garmston, 1988; Oakhill & Patel, 1991; Oakhill & Yuill, 1996; Steig, 1979);
- Monitor and employ "fix-up" techniques (Cain & Oakhill, 2009; Garner, Reis, & Alexander 1981; Lanning, 2009; Lumbelli, 1996); some suggest that error detection tasks are helpful (Ehrlich, 1996) and that readers can learn to rate their level of understanding, figure out whether there are problems at the word and/or idea level, decide whether or not to take action at that point or read on, and apply fix-ups when necessary (Davey & Porter, 1982; Garner & Reis, 1981);
- Generate questions and understand question/answer relationships (Cain & Oakhill, 2009; Chan, 1991; Gersten, Fuchs, Williams, & Baker, 2001; Hahn, 1985; Lanning, 2009; Oakhill & Garmston, 1988);
- Recognize narrative and expository text structures (Cain & Oakhill, 2009; Gersten, et al., 2001; Idol & Croll, 1987; Lanning, 2009);
- Look back into the text for clarification (Garner, 1982; Lanning, 2009; Lumbelli, 1996);
- Select and apply prior knowledge (Hahn, 1985; Lanning, 2009; Oakhill & Garmston, 1988);
- Set a purpose for reading (Lanning, 2009; Parker, et al., 2002);

- Summarize (Cain & Oakhill, 2009; Lanning, 2009);
- Predict (Lanning, 2009);
- Use picture cues (Parker, et al., 2002); and
- Adjust rate (Lanning, 2009).

The use of think aloud protocols are beneficial for teaching as well as assessment purposes (Walker, 2005; Younger, 1995-not on card).

Inference training receives mixed reviews. A number of studies suggest that such instruction is beneficial (Oakhill & Garnham, 1988; Oakhill & Yuill, 1996) especially if students are taught to use their own experience to infer, for example, the motivation of story characters (Hansen & Pearson, 1983). Others believe that such an effort is less productive and transferrable than explicit strategy instruction (Johnson-Glenberg, 2000).

Some texts are more helpful for teaching poor comprehenders than others, although the most crucial criterion may be that such readers read extensively in a diverse array of materials (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2009). It is important that they learn to recognize texts that do not make sense to them, and to avoid these texts, at least initially (Bomer, 1999). Texts that they can decode but cannot comprehend even when read aloud to them are not good choices (Parker, et al., 2002). Texts that are well-organized allow readers to depend on text structure for support (Oakhill & Garnham, 1988).

Teacher/student interactions can significantly facilitate growth in understanding (Lumbelli, 1996). For most poor comprehenders, a program individualized to meet their particular needs is necessary (Cain & Oakhill, 2006). Careful explanation and modeling is important (Baker, 1996; Gersten, et al., 2001) and a gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) allows readers to take an active role in their learning. Poor decoders are frequently interrupted as they read and this is generally not productive for them. However, this approach seems to have the opposite effect for readers who have trouble with understanding; when they read without interruption, they allow "their gaze to glide along sentences and let the language pour over them and right off their backs without ever activating meaning" (Bomer, 1999, p. 31). After an interruption, carefully-selected prompts move the lesson forward (Nation, 2005; Paris & Myers, 1981); for example, a child might be asked whether they think what they've read would be comprehensible to another reader (Oakhill & Yuill, 1996). Paris and Oka (1989) suggest a formal process for these interactions, including explanation, modeling, collaborative goal-setting, ongoing assessment, metacognitive dialogue, and, eventually, self-regulation. Peers may be equally helpful models for poor comprehenders (Gersten, et al., 2001); they may support think aloud protocols and serve as partners to enact book plots (Bomer, 1999).

There is good reason to believe that, despite its rarity in compensatory education and resource room programs, instruction designed to improve comprehension can be efficient and effective. Selection of appropriate content, reading materials, and learning processes is crucial. Cornoldi & Oakhill (1996) note that, when this occurs, effect sizes of such programs approach one positive standard deviation.

Needed research. Given all we know about the positioning, instruction, and profiles of older struggling readers, what research is yet needed? In short, we need studies that investigate in detail protocols which recognize the individual strengths and meet the particular

needs of readers who struggle with print and understanding. There is research within the case study and tutoring literature that approach, although do not fully meet, this goal.

The first known case history of a struggling reader was "A Case of Congenital Word Blindness," (Morgan, 1896). The article described a fourteen-year-old boy who could read virtually no words and even misspelled his own name. He was bright and had sustained no brain damage. In 1923, Leland published what appears to be the first case study of a child's remediation with results described. As late as 1985, Johnston lamented that *Reading Research Quarterly*, a premiere reading journal, had never published a case study, and argued that "case studies involving examination of the individual's goals, motives, and situations should play a much larger role in research into reading failure" (p. 154). A full twenty years later, Dawes (2007) and Dressman, et al., (2005) concurred.

Some of the richest recent case studies have followed struggling readers in non-tutorial contexts. Hettinger & Knapp (2001) studied an eight-year-old verbally gifted child. They used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory to frame his experience, noting that his perfectionistic streak, his focus on "looking good" for his peers, a high-achieving sibling, and lack of access to books at his level on topics he enjoyed all played a role in his predicament. In a study of several early adolescent struggling readers, Enriquez (2011) emphasized the "daily melancholia and performative politics" (p. 90) of their experience, including the interplay between social positioning and agency. Hall (2010) also observed and interviewed three middle school students who struggled with reading. She highlighted "the negative consequences of becoming a good reader" (p. 1792), describing the ways in which their efforts to craft and maintain a reader identity for parents and peers interfered with taking the steps necessary to become stronger readers.

Tutoring studies run the gamut from meta-analyses and reviews of effective programs (Burns, Senesac, & Silberglitt, 2008; Cohen, Kulik, & Kulik, 1982; Denton, Anthony, Parker, & Hasbrouck, 2004; Department of Education, 2001; Elbaum, Hughes, Moody, & Vaughn, 2000; Juel, 1996; Kitano & Lewis, 2007; Morris & Slavin, 2003; Topping & Whiteley, 1990; Wasik, 1998; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) to overviews of specific, standardized tutoring protocols (Invernizzi, Juel, & Rosemary, 1996/1997; Juel, 1991; Wasik & Slavin, 1993) to descriptions of small-scale interactions using qualitative or mixed methods (Dozier, Garnett, & Tabatabai, 2011). Subsets of the latter type of study present a breakdown of a typical lesson (Gaffney, Methren, & Bagdasanan, 2002; Henson & Gilles, 2003; Massey, 2007; Mathes, et al., 2005; Worthy, et al., 2002), an analysis of program results (Lysaker, 2000), transcriptions of tutor/tutee interactions (McKeon, 2001) or some combination of the above (Ambe, 2007; Henson & Gilles, 2003; Hoogsteder, Maier, & Elbers, 1996; Leal, Johanson, Toth, & Huang, 2004; Morris & Gaffney, 2011; Rodgers, 2004/2005; Timmons & Morgan, 2011). I could find only one tutorial study that included all of these elements, Newcomer's 2010 dissertation study of more and less effective tutors in the Reading Partners program. Newcomer studied four minimally-trained community volunteers who tutored fourth graders. She wrote individual case studies, including transcriptions of observed interactions, and noted cross-case themes. She found that tutors of students who made relatively large comprehension gains spent more time reading, modeled and practiced an array of comprehension strategies, and provided more positive feedback. Reading Partners provides clear lesson protocols for its tutors and there was no

indication that instruction responded to individual reading differences among children. Dennis (2009/2010) developed a plan for meeting the needs of a range of struggling reader profiles, but his was not a case study and it occurred in a classroom rather than a tutorial setting. Absent from the research literature is a case and cross-case analysis of a tutoring program developed to meet the needs of a variety of struggling reader profiles in general, and of specific individual strengths and challenges of children who might be served by a such a program.

In addition, we need more information about the structural aspects of such programs; Response to Intervention seems to be the most promising approach. We also need a more specific understanding of the ways in which tutors respond in nuanced ways to the tutees they serve. These two topics will be discussed in the second and third sections of this literature review.

Response to Intervention (RTI)

While Allington (2009) and Pearson (personal communication, 2010) both suggest that Response to Instruction is a preferable term, I will use the phrase more commonly employed in the research literature – Response to Intervention (hereafter, RTI). First promoted via the most recent authorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (U.S. Department of Education, 2004), RTI is currently all the rage. Within the past two years, at least seven books have been published on the topic, one of which focuses primarily on research (Glover & Vaughn, 2010) with the other six emphasizing practical applications of this research (Collier, 2010; Fisher & Frey, 2010; Johnston, 2010; Lipson & Wixson, 2010; McDougal, Graney, Wright, & Ardoin, 2010; Metcalf, 2010). Teachers (Rinalidi, Averill, & Stuart, 2011) and school psychologists (Machek & Nelson, 2007; Machek & Nelson, 2010; O'Donnell & Miller, 2011) are generally supportive of this approach to intervention and there is evidence that, in some schools, it has decreased the special education referral rate (Rinaldi, Averill, & Stuart, 2011). In this section of the literature review, I will discuss the legislative roots of RTI; proposed models for its implementation; and delineate theoretical, practical, and research issues surrounding this construct.

Legislation. In 2004, the most recent iteration of the IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) was authorized. It was a response to the perceived inadequacies of the IQ/achievement discrepancy model that had long been used to designate students as learning disabled (fully described in the Struggling Readers section of this review). The revised legislation asserted that states could no longer require districts to employ discrepancy formulas to determine special education eligibility; it recommended instead the RTI process which made such determinations based on evidence that a child had not achieved at the same level as her/his peers after receiving appropriate classroom instruction and "scientific, researched-based interventions" (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008). The law went on to state that districts could utilize up to 15% of their special education budgets for services provided in the general education setting (Yell & Walker, 2010). At present, there is considerable variation across states, with some (e.g., Colorado) mandating RTI, many in the transitional stage, and some – including California – still employing the discrepancy model as the primary foundation for learning disability determination (Berkeley, Bender, Lindsay, & Saunders, 2009). While it is commonly believed that the RTI model requires universal screening and a tiered system of interventions, there is no language to this effect in the legislation (Wixson & Valencia, 2011).

Models of RTI. Mesmer and Mesmer (2008) provide an easily comprehensible description of a basic model for RTI. The RTI process begins with what is typically referred to as Tier 1: adoption of research-based classroom instructional practices appropriate for all students, as well as universal screening intended to determine which children are likely to benefit from additional support. Those students who need extra help qualify for Tier 2 intervention – small group instruction offered either within or outside of the classroom. When needed, a higher-intensity Tier 3 intervention is provided, typically in a one-on-one setting. This may or may not come with a learning disabilities designation.

Based on their experience in Vermont schools, Shepherd and Salembier (2010) suggest that collaboration among teachers (frequently occurring in grade level team meetings) and between teachers and special educators is crucial, as is rich, ongoing professional development and shared instructional leadership. Grimaldi and Robertson (2011) worked with a Massachusetts school district to develop an RTI model that reflected the recommendations included in *Response to Intervention: Guiding Principles for Educators from the International Reading Association* (Author, 2009). In their model, teachers learned to administer a range of formative assessments and to translate the findings from those assessments into practice; as a result, teachers assumed greater responsibility for the literacy progress of all of their students, rather than expecting children with special needs to fall under the care of support personnel.

Standard treatment vs. problem-solving protocols. Some authors have chosen to differentiate between what are termed *standard treatment* and *problem-solving* protocols for RTI. According to Fuchs, et al. (2003), in the standard treatment protocol the same intervention is provided for all students with similar problems and the primary focus is on quality control. Interventions are typically five to ten weeks in duration which may be too short to produce desired effects (Johnston, 2011). This model is relatively straightforward and, on the surface at least, easier to implement, since the interventions are frequently highly prescribed in nature (Scanlon, 2010). It is the protocol of choice among researchers and most of the available data on RTI implementation comes from experiments using this approach (Wanzek & Vaughn, 2008). There is some concern, however, that standard treatment protocols may ignore the very real differences among children who present with the same academic problem (International Reading Association, 2009).

In contrast, the problem-solving protocol addresses the needs of each child and the focus is on sensitivity to individual differences (Fuchs, et al., 2003). This occurs through a multi-step process of problem identification, problem analysis, plan implementation, and problem evaluation (Hunley & McNamara, 2010). Despite the fact that there is a greater complexity to this design, it is more widely implemented; the states of Ohio and Pennsylvania, as well as the Heartland service district in Iowa, and Minneapolis Public Schools are exemplars. Research relative to the effectiveness of the problem-solving model is still in its infancy, although there is some evidence that prescriptive programs are no more effective than those which are more teacher-responsive (Foorman, Francis, Chen, Carlson, Moats, & Fletcher, 2003; Mathes, et al., 2005); on the flip side, significant failure was observed when standard protocol designs were employed (Torgesen, 2000). While the two models are different in theory, in reality the line between them may be less distinct than might be assumed. Problem-solving protocols often have standardized instructional components and employ curriculum-based assessments such as

words-correct-per-minute measures of fluency (Johnston, 2011) and, even within the standard treatment design, some attention to individual differences at Tier 3 is necessary.

Tiered designs. Despite the fact that there is not specific research support for the commonly used three-tiered instructional model (Allington, 2006), most RTI models employ a design including at least three tiers. Tier 1 refers to classroom instruction that is appropriate for all students, including preventive and proactive elements. It is generally assumed that this instruction will allow about 80% of students to achieve at the level of their peers without additional instructional support (Allington, 2009).

Many districts choose to address the IDEIA's emphasis on adopting research-based curriculum by implementing a published core (often scripted) program at the Tier 1 level (Grimaldi & Robertson, 2011), but this is not a requirement. A workshop model, including small group instruction and one-on-one conferencing, offers a richer alternative (Dorn & Henderson, 2010; Hayas & Klingner, 2010). As Scruggs & Mastropieri (2002) note:

> To avoid inadvertently manufacturing additional reading problems simply from lack of opportunity to learn, interventions for various types of reading difficulties must occur in the context of comprehensive reading instruction that develops a range of important reading-related abilities and that provides ample opportunities for all students to read engaging text. (2002, p. 156)

It is important that this instruction be reflective of students' "cultural, linguistic, socio-economic, and experiential backgrounds" (Klingner, Soltero-Gonzalez, & Lesaux, 2010, p. 156). There should be plenty of time to read and write, an availability of leveled texts, and plenty of conversational – as opposed to interrogational – talk (Allington, 2002). Assessment data collected at Tier 1 should inform instructional decisions at the classroom level and student progress should be compared to that of "true peers" – that is, other similar students (Brown & Doolittle, 2008; Klingner, et al., 2010). This screening usually takes the form of a formal assessment, but this is not required by the IDEIA legislation (Wixson & Valencia, 2011) and a systematic evaluation of student work might serve the same function. Despite the fact the brief assessments streamline the process, the International Reading Association asserts that assessment tools must "reflect authentic language and literacy activities as opposed to contrived tasks . . . The quality of assessment information should not be sacrificed for the efficiency of an assessment procedure" (Author, 2009).

For students whose learning in Tier 1 is inadequate – typically 20% of the population (Allington, 2009) – intervention services are provided at the Tier 2 level. Historically, gains produced by small group instruction are not what we would wish; for example, when functioning at their peak performance, Title I interventions (typically provided in small pull-out groups) achieve an effect size of only .15. There is, however, a significant difference between progress in typical group sizes of 1:10 and much smaller sizes of 1:3, since the variation in reading levels and individual needs is reduced and instruction can be more highly focused (Allington, 2009; Wanzek & Vaughn, 2010). The learning of all students receiving Tier 2 support is regularly monitored using assessment tools that measure growth on the specific objectives around which the intervention is designed (e.g., fluency or comprehension). These assessments should evaluate the instruction itself as well as the progress of students receiving that instruction so that adjustments can be made as needed (International Reading Association,

2009). Tier 2 instruction may closely resemble a more intense form of Tier 1 or it may target more foundational skills than classroom instruction can be expected to provide (Scanlon & Sweeney, 2010).

There are a wide variety of small group lesson designs. Harn, Linan-Thompson, and Roberts (2008), for example, implemented a 30 minute small group intervention for 1st graders including phonics and word recognition, fluency, and passage reading and comprehension. For second grade students, Vaughn, Linan-Thompson, and Hickman (2003) developed a 35 minute instructional protocol consisting of: repeated readings, phonemic awareness, passage reading of an instructional level text, word analysis and spelling, and writing fluency. They found that 75% of students met achievement targets within a 30-week time frame. Dorn & Henderson (2010) recommend a "portfolio" of interventions suited to particular student needs; these include modules for emergent language and literacy, writing process, and comprehension units of study focusing on genre, strategies, and content areas. In contrast, Kamps, et al., (2008) employed heavily scripted direct instruction models, despite the fact that there is virtually no research support for such programs (Allington, 2009).

There are fewer models for Tier 2 intervention at the upper elementary grades. In a year-long intervention for 6th graders that included word study, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension activities, Vaughn, et al. (2010) saw only limited gains. Graves, Brandon, Duesbery, McIntosh, & Pyle (2011) also worked with 6th graders, employing an instructional design that included work on decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension using a collection of commercial programs (Corrective Reading, REWARDS, Read Naturally, and Daybook for Critical Reading and Writing); researchers saw significant gains on a words-correct-per-minute measure, while growth on a maze assessment was not significant.

Sometimes, even if the Tier 2 intervention addresses the correct issue and is implemented with integrity, it is not powerful enough to meet a child's needs; this is commonly true for about 5% of students (Allington, 2009). As Hunley & McNamara (2010) note, "A 'research base' only increases the *probability* that the intervention will have the desired impact; there is no guarantee that it will work" (p. 83). If a child does not progress sufficiently within the small group, (s)he qualifies for Tier 3 assistance, generally provided in a one-on-one tutorial setting. In some models, this involves a learning disabilities designation; in others, special education is considered Tier 3B or 4.

No matter the model, prior to receiving special education services, a group of educators – teachers, administrators, and support staff – is convened. If the child continues to achieve well below the level of his/her peers and the rate of progress is considered inadequate, (s)he may receive a learning disability designation (Reschly, 2005). On the other hand, the group may decide that interventions have not been applied with "fidelity" or additional information or non-academic interventions (e.g., counseling) are needed prior to classification (Mesmer & Mesmer, 2008).

While detailed descriptions of Tier 2 protocols are certainly helpful, they are absolutely necessary at the Tier 3 level where our ability to replicate individualized interventions depends on a clear awareness of tutor/tutee interactions. The only book specifically written about Tier 3 intervention provides detailed descriptions of qualifying processes for intensive support, but it says virtually nothing about what Tier 3 lessons might look like (Hunley & McNamara, 2010).

Casey, Robertson, Williamson, Serio, & Elswick (2011) explain how two different approaches to reading fluency probes were briefly piloted and the more effective of the two selected, but they also provide limited information about the content of the intervention itself.

We know a great deal about Reading Recovery, the only intervention protocol to receive the *What Works Clearinghouse's* highest rating for evidence of success (Clay, 1990). First grade children work one-on-one with a trained teacher; they write, read both familiar and unfamiliar text, and engage in word study. Despite the intensity of this program, there are children who do not progress to the level of their peers. Phillips & Smith (2010) describe what they term "A Third Chance to Learn," an almost fully individualized tutoring program with substantial professional development support for tutors. The authors developed an operational guide designed to refine as well as support teaching practice. Teachers were expected to spend extended time in close observation of the child, develop a list of expectations for the child incorporating both strengths and challenges, and select from a wide-range of teaching prompts to address the child's learning edge. They participated in a formal self-monitoring process to insure they were responding effectively to the child's needs and selecting appropriate places to intervene. The authors provide many examples of interpersonal interactions and clear descriptions of the professional development provided. Many students made significant gains.

Legere & Conca (2010) describe a Tier 3 intervention at the fourth grade level. The intervention provider encouraged a boy reading at first grade level to make instructional choices, assume some control in the lesson, and graph progress. After several months he was reading for pleasure and sharing his ideas with peers; by the end of the year, his reading level had increased by a year and a half.

Other detailed descriptions of one-on-one interventions can be found in the tutoring literature (see previous literature review section on struggling readers); they do not, however, appear within research specifically studying Response to Intervention. Everyone knows that there are children for whom small group support is not enough, yet virtually no one seems to describe how to interact with these children. As McEneaney, et al., (2006) note, work with struggling students involves "a complex set of interrelationships among concepts, observations, instructional procedures and ways of interacting in the social setting of lessons" (p. 125). Given that the results of much of the research on Tier 3 intervention borders on dismal (Denton, Fletcher, Anthony, & Francis, 2006) even with as much as 67 hours of intense instruction (Torgesen, et al., 2001), this is, indeed, a profoundly problematic knowledge gap.

Issues in RTI theorizing, implementation, and research. There are many outstanding issues and unanswered questions relative to Response to Intervention. These include those that are theory-oriented such as issues of equity; the standardization/responsiveness dichotomy; the overarching problem of whether there will, in truth, be any genuine difference between the education we have provided for struggling students historically and that we hope to provide; and the question of whose minds and voices we can trust to effectively address these concerns. There are pragmatic questions as well: At what age should Tier 2 and 3 interventions begin? What constitutes a more "intense" intervention? Why is the issue of special education enrollment so crucial when costs are staggering and we seem to have no idea what to do with children once they get there? – and many others. Finally, there is a concern about what kinds of research will move the RTI project forward in productive ways.

Theoretical concerns. Speaking about equity issues with respect to RTI, Artiles, Bal, & Thorius (2010) state:

> Consistent with traditional approaches to social justice in special education, RTI is caught in the equity-difference dilemma as it aims to give the same treatment (i.e., rigorous instruction) to all groups as well as to deliver justice, while it strives to recognize differences so that students with different ability levels receive tailored learning support. (2010, p. 252)

Even as we hope that all children will benefit from rich classroom instruction, we prepare for the inevitable conclusion that they will not (McDermott, 1993). Many researchers and educators attempt to deal with this dilemma by proposing that everything be standardized to the point that, essentially, no one makes any decisions at all (Allen, 2002). Elements of reading are reduced to the "five pillars" of phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, phonics, vocabulary, phonics, comprehension, and phonics (NICHD, 1999). Classroom curricula are scripted down to the minutest detail. Intervention methods are reduced to protocols so simple that even untrained volunteers can implement them. And counting the number of words read in one minute counts as a nuanced literacy assessment (Orosco, 2010). It is enough to make onlookers from other countries cringe (van Kraayenoord, 2010).

Even if this were to work with mainstream students, what makes us think that English learners, poor children, and children of color will respond in the same way? (Echevarria & Vogt, 2011) As Klingner and Edwards (2006) ask:

> When a teacher does not implement an instructional practice with fidelity, what does that really mean? To what extent is the teacher's reluctance, resistance, and inability to implement a practice in a certain way due to differences between his or her students and the students for whom the practice was originally developed or perhaps to variations in the school context? (2006, p. 112).

A child may, in fact, be "disabled" in one context and not in another, depending on the skill of the teacher and a multitude of other variables (McEneaney, et al., 2006); labeling a child as such positions him (more often than not the correct pronoun) as the Other, responsible for his own failure (Elliott & Gibbs, 2008). If we cannot settle questions of equity and excellence or fully address the presence of oppression in what is portrayed as a purely technical endeavor, it is likely that we will reproduce the same system we've had since the original IDEA was passed and before (Artiles, Bal, & Thorius, 2010).

From the very first discussions of Response to Intervention, school psychologists and special educators—who, in fact, wrote the IDEIA legislation (Hazelkorn, Bucholz, Goodman, Duffy, & Brady, 2011) – have been the voice of the movement (Johnston, 2011). Articles referencing RTI hit the special education journals as early as 2003; it took three more years before they first appeared in general education publications (Hazelkorn, et al., 2011). With their cognitive/behaviorist orientation (Brozo, 2009/2010), Skrtic (1991) questions whether these are the voices we need, since they proceed from assumptions progressive educators do not share; these include:

> a) disabilities are pathological conditions that students have, b) differential diagnosis is objective and useful, c) special education is a rationally conceived and coordinated system of services that benefits diagnosed students, and d) progress results from

> rational technological improvements in diagnostic and instructional practice. (1991, p. 152)

If, instead, we believe that "disability" is as much a matter of context as cognition, that assessment tells us only what a given child can do on a certain day under particular conditions, that current special education practices are of dubious value, and that progress results from attending carefully to what children say and do from day to day, it is quite possible that we need new leaders to take up the RTI banner.

Pragmatic concerns. Even were we to magically settle all the philosophical issues associated with Response to Intervention and with the concept of "disability" more generally, a host of practical issues remain. Researchers and practitioners pose a variety of questions about intervention enrollment. At what age does the intervention cycle begin? While "the earlier the better" appears to be the common wisdom, false positives (that is, finding adequate learners to be more challenged than they actually are) are more frequent at a young age and, with economic resources at a premium, can a district afford to "waste" money on children who would do fine without extra help (Scanlon, 2011)? Might it be possible for teachers to refer only half their class for assessment? (Johnston, 2011). Teacher judgment has, in fact, been shown to be the most accurate predictor of which children will need extra support (Gerber, 2005). If universal screening measures leave no doubt that a child is in need of assistance, does it make any sense to postpone Tier 2 intervention until after a trial period in Tier 1 only? (Scanlon & Sweeney, 2010) . Might the neediest students even proceed directly to Tier 3? (Otaiba, et al., 2009). Once a child begins Tier 2 services, how long should they remain before placement is revisited? If they do well, should they remain there or return to Tier 1 only? In many cases, students who are successfully exited from Tier 2 services fail to progress further (Vaugh &Linan-Thompson, 2003). If children continue to struggle in Tier 2, should they receive a more intense Tier 3 version of the same intervention or something entirely different? (Scanlon, 2011). What does it mean for an intervention to be intensified and how powerful does this intensification prove to be? In some cases this may be a reduction in group size, in others providing more sessions per week or per year, and in still others extending the length of individual sessions. Daly, et al. (2007) insist that instructional intensification alone is not effective. The content of the intervention is as important as how much of it is provided. Wanzek & Vaughn (2008) found that when the intervention protocol for first graders who had not benefitted from a daily 30 minute session was doubled (30 minutes, short break, and an additional 30 minutes), there was little difference in achievement; tutors noted increased levels of fatigue and problem behaviors among the students and it is likely that this contributed to the disappointing result.

There is some concern about the potential lack of coordination between classroom and intervention instruction (Allen, 2002). On one hand, a very successful intervention such as Reading Recovery employs a protocol that may or may not be connected in any significant way to classroom instruction; the strategies children learn from this program are so widely applicable and the effects so powerful that they seem to transcend variations in classroom curriculum. In some cases, if the core curriculum is narrowly defined (an exclusive focus on decoding, for example), a child may be best served by an intervention that balances rather than duplicates classroom instruction. However, as Allington (2009) suggests, when students, struggling readers in particular, have to learn one approach to text in their classroom and a

fundamentally different one in the intervention setting, there is always the danger that they "must develop schizophrenic tendencies just to survive" (p. 91). Instruction in the two venues tends to differ in a variety of ways – from methods of controlling text difficulty (e.g., word frequency vs. predictability vs. decodability) to instructional locus of control (e.g., teacher-directed vs. student-centered). Borman, Wong, Hedges, & D'Agostino (2003) found that the effects of cross-setting curriculum cohesion were associated with an increase of 4.7 to 7.1 normal curve equivalents in reading achievement, the only one of eight variables they studied that proved to be statistically significant.

There are a variety of other concerns addressed in the RTI literature. One is the question of required assessments. Shepherd and Salembier (2010) note that the teachers they studied believed that these assessments were less clear about student progress than they had hoped and failed to adequately measure comprehension of text. With respect to the latter point, the most commonly used progress-monitoring test of understanding is maze, a tool that has been more clearly linked to decoding than to comprehension skill (Spear-Swerling, 2004). The assessments are typically not diagnostic in nature and fail to provide information that informs instruction (Lipson, Chomsky-Higgins, & Kanfer, 2011). They are also costly, both in terms of time and money – a theme that permeates concerns about intervention programs and the professional development required to support teachers as they take on new instructional and leadership roles (Artiles, Bal, & Thorius, 2010; Shepherd & Salembier, 2010).

At the intersection of theory and practice. Response to Intervention is intended to be an effort to avoid, as well as define and address, reading difficulties. Nevertheless, one of the major functions of the movement is to replace the IQ/achievement discrepancy mechanism for defining learning disabilities with one based on lack of response to high quality instruction. For this reason, a great deal of energy and effort are directed at figuring out which children belong in special education and which do not. Some educators, even within the special education community express concern that "the potential of RTI to contribute to instructional practice will be undermined by a continuing preoccupation with *disability*" (McEneaney, et al., 2006, p. 121). If resource room outcomes were more positive, this preoccupation might be understandable, but, in fact, their impact has been deplorably low (Aaron, 1997; Harn, Chard, & Kame'enui, 2011). In a study of Texas resource room programs serving fourth and fifth graders, Torgesen, Rashotte, Alexander, Alexander, & MacPhee (2003) found that these program accelerated reading growth by only .04 standard deviations over and above the progress the children made prior to receiving special education services; at this rate, it would require more than eight years for these children's achievement scores to increase from the fifth to the ninth percentile. Other studies provide similarly discouraging results. Moody, Vaughn, Tejero-Hughes, & Fischer (2000) found that after a year of resource room service, students made no significant gains on the Woodcock-Johnson battery and showed only minimal gains in fluency. In Bentum & Aaron's 2003 study of students enrolled in resource room programs for three to six years, word recognition and comprehension skills remained the same, while spelling and IQ declined. Poplin (1984) calls the whole Student Study Team/Individual Education Plan process into question. And, to make matters worse, none of this comes cheap. The price tag for a student enrolled in special education is approximately $12,000, or $5,500 more than a general education student (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). With special education enrollment at 6.5 million or

13% of the school-aged population (U.S. Department of Education, 2009) the costs are staggering.

And this despite the fact that we know students designated as learning disabled benefit from the same kind of instruction provided to other struggling readers (Elliott & Gibbs, 2008). What kind of instruction do children receive in resource rooms? What is *absent* is as illuminating as what is present. They read very little and receive minimal modeling of decoding and comprehension strategies. Most time is spent in independent seatwork activities (Moody, et al., 2000; Vaughn, Levy, Coleman, & Bos, 2002). Torgesen, et al. (2003) assert that, due to case overloads, the instruction offered is also not as intense as necessary, and it is provided by teachers who are required to take only one course in reading instruction over the course of their credential training.

The labeling and qualification process has social and psychological costs as well as academic ones (Skrtic, 1991), and, on some level, all parties understand this. Teachers have been known to remove students from the unhelpful "help" resource rooms provide and children themselves invent excuses to avoid leaving their classrooms to get the "assistance" they neither want nor need (Allen, 2002). In the end, three fundamental questions remain: What reason do we have to believe that the special education services at the end of the RTI path will look any different than those we've known for decades? What are the practical implications of any effort we might make to change them? And, what obstacles stand in the way of these changes? Unfortunately, the true meaning of the third question is actually: Who is served by enrolling children in programs that are ineffective, at best, and damaging at worst? As Elliott & Gibbs (2008) suggest, labeling addresses macrostructural as well as academic needs: "Without those who are deemed 'unsuccessful,' the successful lose power and position" (p. 486).

Research concerns. If we believe that it is the primary function of educational research to inform teacher practice, what remains to be addressed in the context of Response to Intervention? First, most RTI research has been quantitative in nature with its primary goal being the validation of standard protocol treatment designs (Fuchs, et al., 2003). If we are to fully understand the way interventions play out in the school context – particularly those interventions reflective of the problem-solving protocol – in-depth qualitative studies of instructional settings are crucial (Gersten & Dimino, 2006). This type of research will allow us to understand how to craft support services that attend to program-student, context-student, and teacher-student interactions as well as improving generalizability. It is also important that data from RTI research is disaggregated so that we have a better understanding of the differential effects of a given intervention on a variety of student populations (Klingner & Edwards, 2006). The deficit view of educational variation (Poplin, 1984) has led many researchers to assume that the defining characteristic of struggling learners is the specific weaknesses they demonstrate. This view ignores the fact that there are contexts and areas of proficiency where these learners do *not* struggle (McEneaney, et al., 2006; Triplett, 2007) – that they have personal and academic strengths as well as challenges. Unfortunately, we see little attention paid to an exploration of these strengths within the RTI or learning disability research literature (Poplin, 1984). Finally, given the fact that the shift from a discrepancy- to a response-to instruction model of intervention is a massive practical undertaking; there is a discouraging lack

of research on how specific interventions may be "scaled up," and most of this research is theoretical and/or anecdotal in nature (Denton, Vaughn, & Fletcher, 2003). On the one hand, we need small-scale qualitative research to fill in the details; on the other hand, we need large-scale quantitative studies which paint a broad picture of Response to Intervention programs-in-practice.

There has been some effort to acknowledge the importance of individualization and teacher responsiveness in the intervention literature (Daly, et al., 2007). Vaughn, Wanzek, & Fletcher (2007) go so far as to state:

> Scaffolding students' instruction refers to the thoughtful and responsive sequencing of instruction so that students have ample opportunities to succeed and yet new learning is always occurring. Fundamental to instruction that is scaffolded effectively is the interaction between the teacher and the learner that involves questioning, responding, supporting (cognitively and motivationally), and extending new learning. (2007, p. 181)

Close attention to the fit between a particular child and the interventional context, to teacher-student and peer relationships, and to class and school climate is essential (Case, Speece, & Molloy, 2003; Drame & Xu, 2008). Ysseldyke, Burns, Scholin, & Parker (2010) suggest that the best way to craft appropriate instruction is to place less emphasis on assessment results and more on diagnostic teaching – that is, trying out alternative instructional practices to determine their relative effectiveness. This process should involve children in decision-making (Poplin, 1984). They can collaborate in goal-setting (Davis & Fuchs, 1995) and participate in self-assessment (Gresham, 2004). In the special education setting, it is beneficial for children to discuss the details of their Individual Educational Plan (IEP) with the teachers and support staff with whom they work (Allen, 2002).

If we are to provide individualized and responsive interventions for our neediest students, however, we are unlikely to find the help we need within the RTI literature. There is more information to be found in the research on *culturally responsive*, *differentiated*, and, what I've chosen to call *exploratory* instruction. These are the topics I'll consider in the final segment of this literature review.

Responsive Instruction

The earliest use of the phrase responsive instruction I could find is in the work of Sherman (1980). He states that "the focus of this approach is on the systematic and purposeful arrangement of the instructional setting in order to be responsive to individual student learning needs" (p. 16) and goes on to explain that this approach has its roots in three other influences: individualized instruction, aptitude-treatment interaction (ATI) research, and systematic decision-making. Sherman contrasts individualized instruction with the belief that there is one best way to teach any particular skill or concept and that, if a child does not learn after being taught in that best way, (s)he is somehow at fault. Different children learn different things in different ways and learning is optimized if instruction is varied accordingly. ATI research seeks to find a clear and useful match between a student's character traits (e.g., anxiety) and the way content is presented (e.g., student-centered instruction); this research emphasizes that any particular action taken by a teacher may "bear a direct and causal relationship to what is learned by a student" (Sherman, 1980, p. 9). Finally, teachers are encouraged to use a systematic decision-making process to arrive at the best course of action in any given situation.

While this is intended to be a guide rather than a rigid formula, Sherman recommends the following list of steps: general orientation (knowing when decisions are necessary and resisting the temptation to react habitually), identifying intended outcomes, generation of alternatives, decision-making, and verification (evaluating the effects of the decision).

Sherman suggests that responsive instruction is an organizational framework that incorporates all three influences. His framework includes the following elements:

- Planning instruction – determining instructional intentions and comparing the results of baseline assessment with that intent;
- Structuring learning – specifying content, goals and objectives that emerge from the intentions;
- Delivering learning – estimating the amount of time and space needed, selecting the modality through which the instruction is delivered, choosing activities, and forming groups, as needed;
- Evaluation – determining the effects of the learning event; and
- Remediation – identifying reasons for insufficient learning and considering alternatives for follow-up

Sherman is careful to note that any theory of learning, from a discovery model to a highly directed approach, can be accommodated by this framework; it is meant to facilitate decision-making rather than control it. He also explains that instruction occurs at the intersection of the content, the teacher, and the learner, and that any model that ignores or minimizes any of these elements is unlikely to succeed. Sherman's framework offers a foundation for the more specific constructs I'll be describing next: culturally responsive instruction, differentiated instruction, and exploratory instruction.

Culturally responsive instruction. Au (2009) defines culturally responsive instruction as "teaching that allows students to succeed academically by building on background knowledge and experiences gained in the home and community" (p. 179). There are both "stronger" and "weaker" versions of culturally responsive instruction. In the stronger form, there is a match between school practices and the specific culture from which students originate, incorporating unique patterns of classroom organization, sociolinguistics, cognition, and motivation (Tharp, 1989). In the weaker form, more applicable in multi-cultural settings, there is an attempt to identify models of instruction that are consistent with the world views of a variety of non-mainstream groups (Au, 2009). Au delineates some of the philosophical contrasts between mainstream and nonmainstream cultures:

Mainstream	Diverse
Individual effort	Collaboration
Competition	Cooperation
Personal achievement	Group (especially family) well-being
Material success	Spiritual success
Independence	Interdependence
Control of nature	Harmony with nature

The research literature describes two primary benefits of culturally responsive instruction. First, as Tharp (1989) emphasizes, this form of instruction produces positive academic results,

including basic skills and mastery of content that may be less naturally engaging (Ford & Kea, 2009). Second, culturally responsive pedagogy may serve a more globally empowering function:

> With students of diverse back grounds, conventional school literacy practices may serve as instruments of control and disempowerment, superseding and displacing the literacy practices of students' families and communities. The double bind in this instance is that current societal conditions and school practices make it difficult for students of diverse backgrounds to attain high levels of literacy that would enable them to reflect on, critique, and address situations of inequity. (Au, 1998, p. 308)

In other words, this process is a vicious circle; non-mainstream students may fail to become literate when taught using mainstream practices, and their ensuing lack of literacy may keep them from opposing and replacing the practices that constrained them. It is a recipe for reproduction of vulnerable readers. As Klingner and Edwards (2006) point out, varying interventions for culturally and linguistically diverse students is of particular importance, and we have little knowledge of how to go about this.

What might culturally responsive instruction look like in practice? Ladson-Billings (1995) emphasizes the characteristics of practitioners. The teachers she observed and interviewed saw their pedagogy as an art, ever-evolving and with an element of spontaneity. Their relationships with students were "equitable and reciprocal" (p. 480) and they applied considerable effort to the task of developing a community of learners. They set goals with their students and assessed progress in multi-faceted ways. Callins (2006) adds that culturally responsive teachers hold their students to high standards, but serve as facilitators of learning, rather than presenters of knowledge. As much as possible, these teachers shape the curriculum to reflect student interests (Ford & Kea, 2009) and allow them some amount of control over their learning (Callins, 2006), such as selecting their own writing topics (Au, 2001). In addition, culturally responsive instruction includes a commitment to the community in which students live. This runs the gamut from cultivating a positive perspective on families (Callins, 2006) to working at the macrostructural level to promote policies that support them (Tharp, 1989).

Culturally responsive teaching methods are varied and active in nature (Callins, 2006) and tend to move from the concrete to the abstract (Ford & Kea, 2009). Whole group instruction is limited and students frequently work on projects in cooperative groups (Au, 2009; Callins, 2006). Teachers avoid the typical Initiation-Response-Evaluation participation structure (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1982) and substitute instead discussion techniques that better reflect community norms. Children are encouraged, but not required, to join in a discussion (Au, 2009) and teachers may employ culture-specific structures, such as Hawaiian "talk story" in which two or more children may speak at once (Au & Mason, 1981). Plenty of "wait time" is provided, both between a question and response and between the response and the re-entry of the teacher (Tharp, 1989), and there tends to be a focus on higher-level questions (Rickford, 2001). Culturally-congruent texts (e.g., folk tales) are a mainstream of the curriculum (Jimenez, 1997; Rickford, 2001), offering an "insider view" of life in diverse environments (Au, 2001).

As might be expected, there are some dilemmas associated with culturally-responsive instruction. Gutierrez & Rogoff (2003) remind us that, in a well-intentioned effort to serve a

diverse group of students, we may be guilty of "'essentializing' people on the basis of a group label" (p. 20), operating from the mistaken assumption that we know how to treat each and every African-American child, for example, simply by attending to his/her skin color. It is, of course, important to both support and stretch all groups; one way of achieving this balance is to introduce skills in culturally-compatible ways and then assist students in applying them in more mainstream contexts (Tharp, 1989). Villegas (1988) worries that our attempts to respect and address cultural differences may backfire; he notes schools' long-standing function of rating and sorting children and asserts that:

> Culturally-sensitive remedies to the educational problems of oppressed minority students that ignore this political aspect of schooling are doomed to failure. Worse still, they give the illusion of progress while perpetuating the academic problem and, by extension, the social inequities they mask. (1988, p. 263)

In essence, we cannot confuse a political problem with a pedagogical one.

Differentiated instruction. Despite the ubiquitous use of the term differentiated instruction in contemporary educational discourse, there is minimal research to be found under this heading. Researchers at The National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum define differentiated instruction as:

> a process to approach teaching and learning for students of differing abilities in the same class. The intent is to maximize each student's growth and individual success by meeting each student where he or she is . . . rather than expecting students to modify themselves for the curriculum. (Tracey Hall as cited in Huebner, 2010, p. 79)

Discussions of differentiated instruction demonstrate that it shares some common characteristics with culturally responsive instruction. It emphasizes the need for teachers to deeply understand variations among students (Ankrum & Bean, 2008) and the motivational value of adjusting content and method to reflect student differences (Subban, 2006). Ideally, teachers conduct assessment in authentic situations, observe students closely, and employ a variety of instructional groupings (Ankrum & Bean, 2008).

In other ways, however, differentiated instruction is quite distinct. Foremost among these is an emphasis on the needs of individual students rather than on cultural groups. This may take the form of, for example, individual conferencing, or grouping students according to specific academic need. This is not to be confused with the ability grouping of times past; a variety of grouping formats are used (e.g., by interest or skill need as well as reading level) and group membership changes regularly (Ankrum & Bean, 2008).

While there is evidence that students of all levels benefit from curriculum differentiation (Rock, Gregg, Ellis, & Gable, 2008) there are a number of suggestions pertinent specifically for struggling readers. Ankrum & Bean (2008) recommend that they be taught in smaller groups, assigned shorter texts, and spend more time in teacher-directed activities. Nevertheless, they should also be afforded many of the same opportunities as more advanced students, such as reading silently more often than orally, and selecting reading materials that are of interest to them (Ankrum & Bean, 2008; Knowles, 2009).

Both culturally responsive and differentiated instruction place major emphasis on a rational and systematic approach to students' needs, whether they are more academic or cultural in nature. What this literature does not give us, by and large, is a sense of what

individual teacher-student interactions – planned at the global level but spontaneous at the "point of impact" – might look like. I refer to this type of interaction as exploratory instruction, and, while this is not a term that is present in the research literature, related topics are the subject of the final segment of this literature review.

Exploratory instruction. There are two defined approaches to assessment and teaching that provide the foundation for exploratory instruction. The term *dynamic assessment* was coined by Soviet psychologist A.R. Luria (Lantolf, 2009). In the 1970's, Feuerstein and Hoffman (1979) argued that we could best measure the potential of mentally retarded children via dynamic assessment. Rather than a strictly standardized assessment protocol, children were prompted with a series of clues – from a pre-determined framework (the interventionist form) or only after hearing their incorrect or inadequate answers (the interactionist form) – until they generated an appropriate and complete response (Feuerstein & Hoffman, 1979; Lantolf, 2009). The focus was as much on what children could do as what they could not (Gaffney, et al., 2002). This approach served to blur the distinction between assessment and teaching, and results were easily applicable to ensuing instruction. In a recent study within the field of mathematics, teachers conducted a form of dynamic assessment in a group setting, providing constructive feedback; this was shown to help a range of students and reduced the achievement gap for children of color (Jeltova, et al., 2011).

Stevens, van Werkhoven, and Castelijns (2001) reference a concept called *attunement strategy* that is characterized by a strong teacher-student relationship in which the adult confirms the child's competence and cultivates his/her agency and self-reliance. While the focus of this strategy is on the development of teacher ethos rather than a prescription of particular steps, Stevens, et al. suggest that teachers and students set goals together preceding instruction, that tasks and time/effort expectations are feasible, and that students learn to attribute success to their own efforts. Interactions between teachers and students are non-judgmental and teachers attend closely to students' responses and questions, as well as taking an interest in their perceptions of the tasks at hand. Working with children who demonstrate serious academic and behavioral difficulties, the researchers found a 10% increase in time on task.

In addition, Dressman and his colleagues (2005) assert that all struggling readers are unique and this is foundational to the exploratory instruction approach. While Buly and Valencia (2002) and others have demonstrated clear differences among struggling reader subtypes, like Dressman and his colleagues, I would go further to state that each and every individual struggling reader has her/his own particular academic, affective, and socio-cultural dynamic and that, if we ignore this in our efforts to simplify and codify intervention protocols, we do so at our peril. In fact, these readers differ year to year, day to day, and even minute to minute, and it is only by attending carefully to our interactions with them that we can provide the support they need to achieve at their highest personal, as well as academic, potential. What might such approach look like? I have yet to find the sort of fully informative case study we need within the research literature. As Dressman, et al., note, we would benefit from:

> case studies that use multiple methodological approaches in their gathering of data and that take as comprehensive a view as possible of all the variables – cognitive, socio-

> cultural, and macrostructural, and perhaps others not yet conceived – that contribute to the causes of school and reading failure. (2005, p. 56)

Nevertheless, some useful details are available to us.

How to plan (that which can be planned for). The most important aspect of exploratory instruction is the interactions that occur between teacher and student, interactions which cannot be fully anticipated. Nevertheless, there are elements of instruction that can be planned for. Initial assessment, whether dynamic or static, is crucial, including dialogue with students about what they see their own strengths and challenges to be (Hinchman & Michel, 1999). Stevens and colleagues (2001) recommend collaborative goal-setting as a logical next step; teacher and student can discuss assessment results, decide what to focus on first, plan methods for working on the goal, and think about how they will know when a goal has been reached. The autonomy of readers who are considered less able is often restricted (Margalit, 2003); this is unfortunate since exercising personal choice – whether it is with regard to reading materials or instructional approaches – is very motivating, particularly for struggling readers (Morris & Gaffney, 2011; Triplett, 2004). Focusing on students' strengths and interests is also wise (Dozier, et al., 2011). A gradual release of responsibility model is a fundamental aspect of planning. Initially, the adult is responsible for most of the work. A bit later, the teacher invites the student to participate in a limited way, cues first specific (e.g., predicting) and then general (e.g., does that make sense?) strategy use, reinforces the child's independent use of strategies, and then cultivates metacognitive thinking by encouraging the child to identify and explain their application (Roller, Beed, & Forsyth, 1996). This approach serves to encourage children to take charge of their own learning, particularly in less formal educational settings, such as tutoring, where they may feel less of a need to defer to adult authority (Oldfather, 1994; Rogoff, 1986).

Teacher-student relationships. Particularly for children who find learning to be an ongoing challenge, the importance of a positive relationship with a teacher cannot be overestimated (Triplett, 2004). This is what Dawes (2007) refers to as the need for the child to figure out, in conjunction with the teacher or tutor "Who am I? Who are you? Who are we?" (p. 15). Ultimately, if the pair cannot answer these questions in positive ways, the partnership is unlikely to succeed. A basic component of this relationship is trust – trust that the adult will be fully available to the child and that (s)he will manage the whole process of academic and personal connection while the child negotiates the specific details of the lesson. Lysaker (2000) describes the trust involved in her relationship with a child she tutored: "He seemed to depend on me to respond to his language approximations and interpret them as meaningful" (p. 482). The tutor takes the position that children are competent (Collins, 2011) and that everything they do makes sense within the context of their world; it is the responsibility of the tutor to understand that world – to see the learning process from the child's point of view (Derry & Potts, 1998). This requires attending to the whole child, including emotional needs (Triplett, 2002), and, frequently, a need for physical closeness (Lysaker, 2000). It means listening deeply (Triplett, 2007). In brief, the willingness to embark on a genuine relationship is demanded – what Noddings (1988) calls *care* and what van Manen & Li (2002) call *tact.* Even researchers with a heavily cognitive perspective can't help but ignore the role of relationship in the learning process. In reference to a tutoring study they conducted, McMaster, et al., (2005), almost reluctantly, say the following:

> Another feature of the tutoring treatment was difficult to quantify, but was mentioned by many of the tutored students' teachers. The teachers often spoke of the special relationship shared by the students and their tutors . . . Perhaps there is an important motivational component associated with one-to-one adult tutoring that leads to a stronger desire to engage in reading activities – leading eventually, perhaps, to increased learning. Future researchers may wish to investigate this aspect of individualized tutoring through more systematic observation and interviewing. (2005, p. 460)

What may be most amazing of all is that this relationship is completely bi-directional; teachers are affected as much by the children as the children are by them (Hoogsteder, et al., 1996).

Work with children for whom learning is an ongoing challenge is serious business and not for the faint of heart. Nevertheless, an overly stern nature does not a happy student make. Even as there are times when it is best for the teacher to take a businesslike approach, a little levity is a blessing (Hoogsteder, et al., 1996) and out-and-out laughter most certainly has its place. There must be time – limited to be sure – to share out-of-school lives (Triplett, 2002), as well as to celebrate successes (Lysaker, 2000; Triplett, 2004).

How to talk with children. Successful tutors, in particular, share several qualities. They are confident in their own abilities and keen observers of children's behaviors and moods (Rickford, 2001). They are also flexible in response to unanticipated events, willing to make quick adjustments on the fly (Stremmel & Fu, 1993; Timmons & Morgan, 2011) and make decisions at the local level (e.g., I will do X because this student is currently frustrated) as well as the global level (e.g., I will do X because this student tends to be easily frustrated) (Derry & Potts, 1998). There is no more significant quality, however, than the ability to speak to children in ways that draw them out. What kinds of conversations occur in the context of these relationships?

Questioning serves as a foundation of most pedagogical relationships and this can be a productive way to interact with a child (Stevens, et al., 2001). There is a caveat here, however. It is important not to confuse a conversation with an interrogation. Too many questions can actually constrain a student's thinking, with the interaction sounding more like a fill-in-the-blank exam than a dialogue (Stremmel & Fu, 1993).

While the quality of questioning is important, the ways in which a teacher responds to the child's questions and statements is even more so. In this regard, one might adopt the old adage "restraint is the better part of valor." In their study of the ways in which tutors model for students, Derry and Potts (1998) found that unskilled tutors tended to respond to errors immediately and directly, while more effective tutors delayed their response. As Gaffney, et al. (2002) note, "The first response should always be to wait – if only for a few seconds" (p. 133). This is the time when deep listening occurs, a time when the adult attempts to understand aspects of the child's reasoning that are not immediately apparent (Duffy & Roehler, 1987). It is also the time to attend to more than the content of what the child says – to tone of voice, hesitancy, etc. (Derry & Potts, 1998). It is not possible – nor is it desirable – for the adult to respond to everything – and it is in those first few seconds that the decision about what to attend to and what to ignore is made (Rodgers, 2004/2005).

Once the adult decides that a response is in order, the next question is what the response should be. Wharton-McDonald, Pressley, & Hampston (1998) assert that teachers of high achievers they observed "interceded with just enough help to facilitate learning but not so much that they lost the flow of the lesson" (p.116). Cole (2006) refers to these responses as *primary cues*, that is cues that keep the reader moving (e.g., providing the initial letter sound, or quickly re-reading a segment of text to provide the child with a running start); these are in contrast to *secondary cues* which serve only to stall the process (e.g., "Remember we had this word on our spelling list last week?"). The teacher may also choose to "revoice" what the child has said – providing an alternative statement with which the child can disagree ("So we'll just skip all these hard words, right?") or restating what was said with an extension (O'Connor & Michaels, 1993).

One further thing need be said about the environment within which these conversations occur. Some researchers believe that, especially when working with struggling readers, it is crucial that lessons be tightly prescriptive, leaving no room for "error." But how likely is it that such an environment could ever exist or that anyone would want to attempt to learn in it even if it did? Others see the potential in an environment that encourages experimentation. Rodgers (2004/2005) suggests that the opportunity for error – and the cultivation of risk-taking behavior that makes the most of it (Oldfather, 1994) – is transformative for the tutorial relationship. Berne& Degener (2010), for example, proposes that it may be best for readers to work at their high instructional level when adult support is available because challenging texts will produce a larger number of miscues from which more can be learned by both the teacher and the child.

There is, of course, something intangible and indescribable about the best conversations with children. They meet children where they are and help them see where they might soon be. Randy Bomer is a master of this kind of dialogue and I end with an example from a conversation he had with a struggling reader who yearned to read the books that engaged his peers:

> Reading has to make sense, J.T. You need to feel strong and smart. When you read those other books, you feel weak and small – so stay away from those for now. You will be able to read them, if you do what you need to and get stronger. You want your arms to be strong, you do one curl at a time, with the weight you can lift. You don't get strong by trying to pick up a car. To get strong as a reader, you do one book at a time, and you work with the books you can read. (1999, p. 28).

The research on struggling readers is extensive and, in some ways, quite clear. There is strong evidence that attempting to distinguish between reading disabled and other poor readers is not fruitful since their similarities far outweigh their differences. We know a great deal about the ways in which these readers have been positioned socio-culturally and politically and about the lack of richness in the instruction commonly provided for them. It is quite clear that struggling readers are a heterogeneous group, but there are few descriptions of how to adapt instruction to meet their varied needs. We also know very little about the structural supports that might allow us to serve these children. The Response to Intervention literature purports to fill this gap, but, shackled as it has been by the sort of deficit thinking that has long plagued the special education literature, a perspective that acknowledges students strengths as

well as challenges is needed. We must also face head on the large number of theoretical, practical, and research-related issues connected to Response to Intervention. Finally, research on culturally responsive and differentiated instruction helps us to understand how we might craft curriculum to meet the needs of various cultural groups and academic levels, but we don't know enough yet about how to respond to individual children in all their rich variety. The study described in the following chapter attempts to address these issues.

My dissertation is rooted in and expands upon the literature I've just reviewed. Struggling reader research tells us a lot about who these children are and how to help them, but it does little to recommend a useful over-arching structure for serving them. The Response to Intervention literature suggests such a structure, but is fuzzy on the details of intense instruction protocols for children whose struggles are most debilitating. And research regarding responsive instruction provides details, but rarely offers a combination of rigorous research design and exemplars from teacher-child interactions. It is the goal of this dissertation to accomplish all three of these tasks. In service of such an effort, I address the following research questions:

1. What is the experience of vulnerable fourth grade readers over the course of an intervention in which connections within and among ecological systems are strengthened?
2. What commonalities and differences are noted among the students?
3. What intervention components have the potential to assist vulnerable fourth grade readers to read more effectively and engage more fully?

Outline of Chapters

Chapter 2 begins with a description of the pilot study that served as the foundation for this dissertation research. It also explains (a) the research literature in support of my research design, (b) data collection,(c) a brief overview of the instructional program, and (d) data analysis procedures. The focus of Chapter 3 is the individual children with whom I worked – who they were at the beginning of the study, my understanding of the way they operated in both the affective/social and academic realms, and the progress they made over the course of our time together. It is possible to compare these three students through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and this cross-case analysis supplies the content for Chapter 4 – how the children interacted with microsystems and mesosystems such as texts and peers, in what ways exosystems like standardized tests and the health care system played a role, how affected the children were by the passage of time, and in what ways oppressive class and race factors had an impact on their lives. Chapter 5 describes in detail the personal as well as academic interactions that constituted the intervention designed to serve these students. Finally, Chapter 6 explains the broader impact of this study and implications for theory-building and professional practice, as well as recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2: Methods

This study is an embedded case analysis (Yin, 2003) of vulnerable fourth grade readers. It also employs a formative experiment design (Reinking & Bradley, 2008) attempting to determine what types of intervention might prove useful in helping these children improve and expand their repertoire of reading tools. I initially requested that teachers at the research site refer students who struggled with some aspect of reading, but who also had clear strengths as well as challenges. I assessed and interviewed the 42 children who were referred and then selected four to be included in the study. Over the course of the school year, I conducted follow-up assessments and interviews, observed students in their classrooms, spoke with parents and teachers, and met with each child in both one-on-one and small group settings.

Background

In this section I will describe the pilot study I conducted in spring of 2010; the initial plan for the intervention I provided, including the literature I consulted in developing that plan; and revisions to the protocol that were necessary in order to respond to a change in reader profiles.

Pilot Study

In spring of 2010, I conducted a pilot study at an elementary school in a large West coast city. Education Without Boundaries (EBS)[2] served approximately 350 students. Of these children, 52% were Latino, 20% African-American, 12% Asian, and 16% other ethnicities/no response given. 92.7% of students received free or reduced price lunch and 59.8% were English learners. EBS is one of two small schools located on the campus of the former Madison Elementary, a school that had been closed several years earlier, and had been in operation since the 2007-2008 school year. I selected this site for several reasons. First and foremost, I wanted to conduct this study in an urban school with a relatively diverse population. Second, I had been a student teaching supervisor for one of the fourth grade teachers there and looked forward to working with her and her colleagues. Finally, the principal had a strong commitment to meeting the needs of students who struggled in school; he viewed my research as yet another way to serve these children.

During the course of this pilot study, I worked with four fourth grade students who were referred by their teachers because they struggled to comprehend text. Initial assessments supported this judgment, since all four students demonstrated inadequate comprehension on an Informal Reading Inventory (IRI), despite the fact that their accuracy and fluency remained at or above adequate levels. Near the end of January, I began meeting with the four students twice each week for one hour per session. A typical class session included several elements:

- A decoding puzzle (reinforcement of strengths);
- Teaching of a comprehension strategy mini-lesson in the context of a culturally-relevant interactive picture book read-aloud – or – guided reading of a shared text (strategy instruction);
- A time for silent reading of self-selected texts at their independent reading level and conferencing with me (strategy practice); and
- Compliments for each other about what went well that day (community building).

[2] This name is a pseudonym, as are the names of all children and adults who participated in this study.

These sessions continued until early June (34 sessions in all). In mid-June, I re-assessed the students. Other data sources included student surveys, audio recordings of class sessions, student journal writing, field notes, and analytic memos. Analysis of the data offered the following trends:

- Students grew an average of one year in instructional level as determined by the IRI over the course of the semester.
- All students exhibited increased reading stamina over time. They read for longer periods and with more engagement, both in our group and within the classroom. Teachers were in unanimous agreement that interest in reading and willingness to read increased significantly over the semester.
- Most students were responsive to the over-the-shoulder instruction I provided while they read independently, but demonstrated difficulty attending to instruction addressed to the whole group.
- Despite the fact that all of the students exhibited the same presenting problem (low comprehension despite relatively strong fluency), they were dissimilar in other sometimes quirky ways.

Preparation for the Dissertation Intervention

Despite the success of this pilot study, I made several changes to the study protocol for my dissertation research. I planned to work with students in a one-to-one setting as well as in a small group in an effort to provide instruction to which children could fully attend and to fine-tune that instruction to meet individual needs. I added classroom observations in order to note the ways in which the children were or were not positioned as vulnerable readers in that setting. I included interviews with parents as well as students and teachers. I also planned carefully for how the one-on-one and small group lessons would be structured, beginning with foundational readings on the topics of tutoring, collaborative-goal-setting, student research, and discussion.

Tutoring. There is a consensus in the research literature that tutoring is an effective way to meet the needs of vulnerable readers (Cohen, et al., 1982; Dept. of Education, 2001; Elbaum, et al., 2000; Juel, 1996; Wasik, 1998; Wasik & Slavin, 1993). Bloom (1984) notes that he and many of his graduate students have devoted years to the search for classroom methods that can provide for groups of students what one-to-one tutoring offers to those who struggle with learning. Most of these tutoring studies, however, look at young students (Juel, 1996; Wasik & Slavin, 1993), those tutored by peers (Cohen, et al., 1982) or by volunteers (Wasik, 1998). Nevertheless, we can apply some aspects of these findings to work with older children. Juel suggests that tutoring is successful because it demands a high level of engagement from both the child and the tutor and that it produces "individualized, contextualized feedback" (p. 268). Elbaum, et al. (2000) determined that tutoring sessions that focused on comprehension were more effective than those that emphasized phonics (2.41 versus .43 effect sizes, with those of mixed focus coming in at .5). In assessing the factors that most influenced tutoring effectiveness, Morris & Slavin (2003) listed the quality and appropriate level of instruction, enough time for instruction and practice, and a supportive tutor/tutee relationship. Juel echoes this finding, noting the importance of "affection, bonding, and reinforcement" (p. 282).

Wood, et al. (1976) describe the cognitive aspects of tutoring, emphasizing the importance of scaffolding. They note that, in order to be successful, the tutor must hold two models in mind – that of the task to be accomplished and the characteristics of the tutee. Without focusing on both these things at the same time, without attending to context as well as task, the tutorial is likely to go astray. As Noddings (2003) asks, "What form or level of learning is called for by *this* topic, for *this* student, in *this* situation?" (p. 244). Finally, Wood, et al. list seven tutor functions:

- To gain the tutee's interest and attention;
- To model – from the beginning of the task or from the child's entry point;
- To reduce the elements of the task for which the child has responsibility;
- To keep the child focused and willing to take the next step;
- To interpret discrepancies between what the child does and what is expected;
- To mitigate the child's level of frustration; and
- To confirm success.

Noddings (1988; 2003) speaks to the role of affect in the tutorial relationship. She emphasizes the child's need to feel listened and responded to, and describes the effective tutor's response as one of "*engrossment* (non-selective attention or total presence to the other for the duration of the caring interval)" (Noddings, 1988, p. 220).

Collaborative goal-setting. In his article, "Choices for Children: Why and How to Let Children Decide," Kohn (1993) asserts that unproductive student behavior – both tuning out and acting out – are symptoms of student burn-out due to a sense of powerlessness. He states, "They are compelled to follow someone else's rules, study someone else's curriculum and submit continually to someone else's evaluation" (p. 10). Kohn suggests that when children have some control over their school lives, they experience general well-being, an increased ability to make decisions, and higher achievement. He recommends that children be afforded some control over what tasks they do, how they do them (alone or in a small group; sharing out or not), and how the work is assessed.

Putman & Walker (2010) suggest that children are more motivated to read and write if they set goals in collaboration with their teachers. Short-term goals should be personally meaningful, optimally challenging, involving incremental change, and regular feedback. They should also be aligned with a longer-term goal. Teachers should model both the goal-setting process and some level of struggle in goal-oriented efforts, and should provide encouraging feedback (Schunk, 2003). Both process- and product-oriented goals proved beneficial for struggling readers (Schunk & Rice, 1991) and Sanacore (1999) suggests that goal-setting is even more crucial for those children to whom learning comes less easily.

Student research. There is very little literature on teaching research writing skills to students. Dreher (1995) studied able 6th grade readers who were writing social studies reports. She found that they had little trouble generating research questions, but that they had considerable difficulty finding answers to those questions in reference materials. Over half of the students directly copied sections of text that were one paragraph or more in length. Some students were able to effectively follow the report structure assigned by the teacher, while others struggled to do so. Overall, there was a considerable range in the quality of the final products.

In a more recent study, Dreher, Davis, Waynant, & Clewell (1997) worked with fourth graders. They taught a research protocol that included lessons in gathering and organizing information, drafting, revision, proofreading, developing visual aids, presenting, and self-evaluation. These lessons were presented in response to student request and observations of the research process. Students' research skills improved significantly over time.

Discussion. In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the role of discussion for the facilitation of reading comprehension. Some of the most interesting research has been conducted by Soter and her colleagues (2008; 2009). Soter, et al. (2008) note that discussions most likely to lead to improved comprehension are structured, occur when student talk is high relative to teacher talk, evolve from open-ended and authentic questions, and involve affective connections from reader to text. They group discussion stances into three categories: efferent, expressive, and critical-analytical. Students tended to talk the most in expressive approaches, followed by critical-analytical. Not only did teachers tend to dominate the discussion in efferent approaches, but they seemed to do most of the "thinking work" as well. Murphy, Soter, Wilkinson, Hennessey, & Alexander (2009) determined that, of these three approaches, most increased literal and inferential comprehension, but, with the exception of Junior Great Books, only critical-analytical approaches fostered critical thinking, reasoning, and argumentation.

Other work has focused on children who find reading to be a challenge. In a study of discussions among 5th grade struggling readers, Celani, McIntyre, & Rightmyer (2006) referred to what they termed "developed discussions." In such discussions a topic of substance was maintained for an extended period of time, and students offered interpretations which they supported by text, personal, or background knowledge. Adult facilitators asked open-ended questions, acknowledged and extended student responses, requested evidence, and invited participation. They differentiated their comments to particular students based on assessed need. Kong & Pearson (2003) found that students did not always take immediately to open-ended discussions, even when teachers made every effort to develop a sense of community among students. Ultimately, however, student expertise and engagement expanded over time.

The Children I Expected to Find . . . The Children I Found

It had been my original intent to once again work with children who were fluent decoders with weak comprehension and, in the fall of 2010, I went about looking for these children by talking to their third grade teachers from the previous year. Despite the fact that teachers generated a long list of names, follow-up assessments showed that most of these children had decoding as well as comprehension issues; they were, in Stanovich's (1988) words "garden-variety" vulnerable readers. I could find only two children who fit the profile I was seeking: Timmy and Sam, African-American and Chinese-American boys respectively. There was some indication that a change in focus at the third grade level, emphasizing the ability to answer questions in response to text, had increased skill in low-inference[3] comprehension. At this point, I made the decision that I would select two other students who fit the opposite

[3] P. David Pearson (personal communication, 2011) asserts that there is, in fact, no such thing as "literal" comprehension since all understanding requires some level of inference. As per his suggestion, I use the terms *low-inference* and *high-inference* comprehension.

profile: poor/disfluent decoders with strong comprehension. I chose Bella (a Latina) and Ethan (a Latino).

Additional assessments demonstrated that, in fact, these students' profiles were more nuanced than I had originally realized. Sam and Ethan were relatively "pure" cases (showing difficulty with comprehension and decoding, respectively). While Bella's presenting issue appeared to be decoding, I came to understand that, in truth, it was her limited vocabulary base that made it difficult for her to figure out unknown words; she simply did not have referents for many of the approximations she generated. Timmy did struggle to comprehend, but he also had some trouble with multi-syllable decoding and was so anxious about this difficulty that I knew I would have to attend to his anxiety. I had initially intended to include Paul (a Latino) in the study as well. However, his difficulties proved less debilitating than I originally thought and so he attended the small group sessions but did not receive tutorial support. The three fourth grade teachers (Ellen, Katya, and Libby) participated in the study, as did Timmy, Bella, and Ethan's mothers and Sam's father.

Given the background reading I had done and my more substantive understanding of the strengths and challenges of these particular readers, I developed the basic structure for the tutorial and small group sessions. The emphasis for the tutorial time was supporting individual strengths and addressing individual needs, and so the lessons had three elements: collaborative goal-setting, guided reading, and independent reading. Small group sessions for the first half of the year were called Study Circle with a focus on conducting research and writing/illustrating books based on that research. Book Circle occurred during small group time during the second half of the year; we read and discussed shared texts. Both Study Circle and Book Circle sessions began with a Wheel of Fortune puzzle to foster use of letter sounds and context clues.

Bella, Sam, and Timmy participated in 30 tutorial and approximately 31 small group sessions, the latter dependent upon school attendance. Ethan attended fifteen tutorial and twelve small group sessions due to his February move. These sessions began in early October. The tutorials ended between late March and early April and small group meetings continued through the second-to-last week of school. Ultimately, I decided to focus this dissertation on Bella, Sam, and Ethan since they had the clearest profiles, struggling with vocabulary, comprehension, and word recognition respectively.

Data Collection

This study followed a fundamentally systemic rather than an analytic paradigm (Salomon, 1991); that it, it focused on the ways in which events and actions were tied to and correlated with each other. Therefore, the research emphasis needed to be not on isolated variables, but on the ways in which variables related to each other, noting shifts in complex patterns.

I collected both qualitative and quantitative data. The emphasis on qualitative data reflects the emerging character of the study and my desire to generate data rich in detail and embedded in context. The quantitative data is an appropriate supplement to gauge student progress. Primary data sources were field notes and observation guides from classroom visits, in-person surveys, semi-formal and informal interviews, assessment results, and audio- and video-tapes of tutorials and small group sessions.

I began informal classroom observations during the first week of school so that children could become used to my presence. Formal observations (recorded in field notes) started in late September, as soon as focal students were selected. I attended to the way they positioned themselves and were positioned during instructional time – assessing student participation in discussion, interaction with peers and teachers, and level of focus in independent work. These observations were ongoing over the course of the study, approximately ten hour-long sessions per child.[4] In an effort to utilize low-inference measures (Donmeyer, 1990), I developed an observation protocol involving timed, stream-of-activity reporting.

Once students were selected, I administered a diagnostic assessment—the Critical Reading Inventory (CRI) – with each child, measuring oral reading accuracy, fluency, and comprehension, as well as silent reading comprehension, and including both narrative and expository texts (Applegate, Quinn, & Applegate, 2008). I also assessed listening comprehension. A think aloud protocol and the Metacomprehension Strategies Index (Schmitt, 1990) were used to evaluate reading strategy use. I also had access to district comprehension and fluency benchmark scores, as well as student cumulative files.

I conducted audio-taped, in-person surveys with each of the students at the beginning and end of the study. These surveys – focusing on beliefs about and attitudes toward reading, text preferences, and reading strategies – served two primary purposes. The first was to collect research data and the second was to obtain information that helped me to plan effectively for instruction. For example, knowledge about text preferences allowed me to track potential changes over time, but also to find texts that were engaging for students during our tutorial and small group sessions. Informal interviews with students began midway through the study, probing for their opinions about the work we were doing together.

Teacher interviews were also audio-taped and conducted at the beginning, mid-point, and end of data collection. I probed for information about student strengths and challenges, interests, and sense of themselves as readers. Each interview was relatively short, about fifteen minutes per child. I scheduled parent interviews at a time and location that was convenient for them. Topics covered were similar to those for teachers. In addition, I asked parents to talk about their views about reading and the role reading plays in their lives. These audio-taped interviews lasted about 30 minutes.

Other data collection was ongoing. I audio-taped tutorial sessions and video- and/or audio-taped each small group meeting. Since I was the teacher in this study as well as the researcher, these tapes provided a rich source of data that allowed me to see and hear things of which I might not otherwise have been aware. I was given district assessment data whenever such tests were administered and also collected copies of these tests. I re-administered the Informal Reading Inventory and asked for student opinions about our collaborative work when each child had completed fifteen and then thirty tutorial sessions. I conducted post-testing using all assessments and interview questions at the end of the school year.[5]

[4] About half this for Ethan who moved away in February.

[5] Data collection timeline in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

Analysis of data began almost immediately. This was important because, since this was a formative study, decisions about lesson planning emerged from the collected data. I listened to audio/watched video within a day or two of each session, kept a content log, and developed upcoming lesson plans based on what I heard and saw. I inductively generated a "start list" from these content logs (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Glaser (1998) and others suggest that analytic memos are a productive way to explore emerging themes and facilitate decision-making; I wrote a number of these memos early on. However, I ultimately found that my time was better spent jotting less formal notes in a notebook whenever insights came, and I continued this practice throughout the study.

After data collection was complete, I developed an assessment/interview matrix; charting all pre- and post-data allowed me to identify "patterns, comparisons, trends, and paradoxes" (Maxwell, 1992). I also transcribed all tutorial/small group sessions. Then I re-read about half of the transcripts to revise my original code list. At that point, I read through each transcript carefully, highlighting and coding in the margins. Next I developed a code matrix for each child, listing iterations of that code along with the date they occurred and whether they took place in the tutorial or small group setting; this allowed me to see the sheer volume of occurrences for each code and the density during particular periods of time. Once this matrix was complete, I made a code profile for each child, listing the raw data for each code (e.g., connections to family: nineteen instances, all but one in tutorial), a summary of the data (e.g., these connections dropped off during the winter), and theoretical statements that seemed to be supported by the data (e.g., low energy in winter due to illness), including alternative explanations (e.g., curriculum during winter might be less conducive to these connections?). Later, I grouped codes into larger categories that were used to structure the case analysis (affective/social realm, academic realm, and the intersection of the two) and the cross-case analysis (Bronfenbrenner's micro-, meso-, exo-, chrono-, and macrosystems). Finally, I went through a similar process for coding in preparation for writing the formative experiment chapter.

Chapter 3: Bella, Sam, and Ethan

Strategy and Tactics in the Vulnerable Reader System

In his seminal work *The Practice of Everyday Life*, cultural theorist Michel de Certeau (1984) proposes that there are two fundamentally different (although not mutually exclusive) ways of acting in the world: Strategy and tactics.[6] In essence, Strategy is the planful method of those in power who produce a space over which they exert ultimate control. Buchanan (2000-not on card) refers to this space– an arena within which the powerful can limit the many variables that affect them – as a "protected zone, a place in which the environment can be rendered predictable, if not tame" (p. 89). Nevertheless, Strategy also has the advantage of being decontextualized; it may originate in a strong sense of place but is easily transferrable to other domains. Tactics, on the other hand, are a loose assemblage of spontaneous actions carried out by those with little power. Tacticians have no space to call their own but must rely on "cracks" in the system, random opportunities, and impeccable timing. de Certeau sees the platform of tactics as ingenious and creative, yet ultimately unproductive since "what it wins it cannot keep" (p. 37).

Oddly, both tacticians and Strategists typically operate in the realm of the unconscious: tacticians are blind to the Strategist's overall plan and Strategists are blind to the underutilized potential of the tactician. de Certeau (1984) employs the metaphor of disparate views of a city. The Strategist rides to the top of a skyscraper where (s)he takes in a panorama of buildings and boulevards. The tactician wanders through alleyways and cul de sacs having no such overarching vantage point. While the tactician's limitations are more evident, the Strategist, too, is constrained – unable to fully take in the details of life "on the street."

I would argue that most children whom we view as invulnerable readers are, by-and-large, Strategists. Typically, they are masters of the dominant Discourse (Gee, 1996) and, as a result, they control the playing field of interactions with text. Their high level of skill allows them to make the act of reading relatively predictable and they easily transfer these skills from one context to another. They are able to function successfully even if the text or task is not to their liking, or if they are only minimally supported by those around them. On the other hand, vulnerable readers are, almost by definition, tacticians. They employ a collection of idiosyncratic approaches as they deal with text. These approaches are highly context-bound – that is, they are appropriate only in particular situations and for particular ends. These readers are profoundly and adversely affected by reading inconsiderate texts, engaging in inauthentic tasks, and interacting with unsupportive adults and peers.

Both groups suffer from their own unique blind spots. Vulnerable readers don't "get" one or more elements of the reading process or, they may control each of the individual elements but are unable to choreograph the way these elements interact; both of these problems interfere with the ability to experience reading as a relatively effortless and deeply enjoyable activity. They keep the reader from establishing his/her "place" in the world of texts.

[6] Within the realm of literacy instruction the term *strategy* is more typically used in reference to specific approaches to constructing meaning from text. For the sake of clarity, I will capitalize the term when using it in the fundamentally de Certeauian sense. However, there are times through the course of this dissertation when the distinction is not as simplistic as this since reading strategies, when used productively, are also Strategy.

Invulnerable readers, in contrast, are blinded by their own success. They have the expectation that reading of any and all texts will come easily to them, whether or not they attend to textual nuance, and that their tactically-oriented peers will have little to offer in terms of extending and expanding their reading experience.

In order to best serve our most vulnerable readers, we must do two things simultaneously. First, we need to help these children to move away from an over-reliance on tactics that, however well they may have served them in the past, are now limiting their ability to move forward. Second, we need to acknowledge and even celebrate the ingenuity of these tactics and encourage the readers who employ them to view the Strategy they are learning as supplements to, rather than as substitutes for, the practices they have used in the past. In some sense, it is the ingenuity and moxie that propelled children to invent idiosyncratic tactics that may give them the motivation to learn and implement the Strategy we offer them.

In this first of three results chapters, I will focus on the individual stories of three of the vulnerable fourth grade readers – tacticians all – with whom I worked during the 2010-2011 school year. Bella is an energetic sprite of a child hampered by her limited English vocabulary but propelled forward by an insatiable desire to grow as a reader. Sam has long found that a nearly-complete withdrawal from the academic and emotional life of the classroom seemed to best serve him, but learned to transfer his very systematic approach toward mathematics to the realm of reading. Ethan often struggled to read even the simplest sight words, but brought his broad and deep knowledge of the world to bear in comprehending texts that, by any common measure, would have been considered too difficult for him.

For each child, I will provide a description of their positions at the beginning of the study, as well as their initial beliefs about the way language and literacy works. I'll give particular attention to the tactics they employed when I first came to know them. Then I'll offer an analysis of the way in which their strengths and challenges played out across the affective/social and cognitive realms of their school experience, as well as their on-going work with me. Next, I'll evaluate their academic and personal growth over the course of the study, including the tactics they continued to employ as well as the Strategy they learned. I'll conclude each child's section with *In Her/His Element* – a vignette intended to capture the essence of each child's approach to text and, indeed, to life.

I left my experience with these children having gained a profound appreciation of the very real obstacles that interfered with their literacy to date, but also the great tenacity they brought to the printed page. I invite you to enjoy their stories.

Bella: Eagerness Is My Friend

Bella is perky, petite, and wide-eyed. The daughter of a beautician, she has long, dark hair which she manages with one of a large assortment of colorful hair bands, some decorated with glitter. Yet Bella is no girly-girl. On one occasion she came to school wearing new sports shoes but was quick to assure me that she had no interest in maintaining their pristine appearance if that meant she had to avoid the high-energy schoolyard games she prefers. In fact, she plays a mean game of Four Square.

Bella is a native Spanish-speaking English learner. At the beginning of the study, her California English Language Development Test (CELDT) scores averaged in the Early Intermediate range with speaking and writing scores higher and listening and reading scores

lower. She was ranked Below Basic in both math and English language arts on the California Standards Test (CST).

Based on the Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) I employed to assess Bella's reading, her instructional level was somewhere between second and third grade, depending on the genre of the text (narrative stronger than expository) and the method of reading (oral reading stronger than silent – and much preferred). Her listening comprehension was no stronger than her reading comprehension. In analyzing Bella's miscues and understanding of text, relative challenges for Bella included decoding (particularly words not in her oral vocabulary), fluency, maintenance of syntactical and semantic similarity (confirmed by a maze assessment), knowledge of word meanings (both in isolation and in context), use of prior knowledge to facilitate understanding, and high-inference/critical comprehension. Relative strengths included a strong interest in reading, sight vocabulary, and low-inference comprehension/retell. The latter was particularly striking given major difficulties with vocabulary. A think aloud protocol demonstrated her awareness of confusion at both the word and idea level, and her selection of image-making as her method of choice for constructing meaning. Results on the Metacomprehension Strategy Index (MSI) demonstrated that Bella had great difficulty selecting useful approaches to accessing text before, during, and after reading. She viewed slowing down and re-reading as her "fall-back" plans when dealing with breakdowns in comprehension.[7]

Bella preferred school subjects that are more concrete and hands-on such as science and art, and struggled with math; she hoped to become an artist. She stated that she enjoyed reading unless she was required to read in a public setting, naming fluency testing with her teacher and, especially, reading aloud in front of her peers, as particularly daunting. Of fourteen different free time activities[8], she chose reading as her first and writing as her second choice.

Bella was somewhat conflicted about what it means to be an effective reader. Some of her responses portrayed her as a reader who sees the purpose of reading as meaning-based, but others offered a more mechanistic perspective. She viewed coming to an understanding of and learning from text as the primary purposes for reading, yet when asked specifically why *she* read, Bella answered that it helped her to learn how to write long words. She believed that a fast, accurate reader who is confused is a better reader than one who reads slowly but understands; however, she thought that her teacher favored strong comprehenders over fluent readers. When asked to name the best reader she knew, Bella selected a boy in her class who "never misses any words" when reading aloud.

Bella's connections with others influenced her reading development. She reported reading for 30 minutes at home each day (as required by her teacher) – usually reading aloud to her mother while she cooked. Her older sister (17) and older brother (15) sometimes read with her, as well. Bella said she talked with family, peers, and teachers about what she was reading and that adults, although not peers, influenced her book selection.

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[7] See complete assessment results in Appendix B.

[8] Activity choices were: call a friend, cook, dance, go on the Internet, play a card or board game, play a team sport, play an individual sport, play outside, play video games, read, sing/play an instrument, watch a movie, watch TV, write

However, Bella's connections to the process of learning to read and to books were tenuous at best. While she remembered her mother putting words on cards for her to read and, when this came more easily, helping her to read books, she didn't remember anything specific about learning to read in school. She had only a vague memory of a book she had particularly enjoyed and did not have a favorite author. When asked about the two most recent books she'd read, Bella listed *Frog and Toad* (well-below her reading level) and *Henry Potter* (far above it). She rarely visited the library and had no library card of her own. She stated that if she had additional time she would read more.

When asked to speak about her reading, Bella's self-evaluation was remarkably in tune with the assessments I conducted. She said that she viewed herself as an OK reader, but thought that others saw her as a good reader. She believed that remembering what she'd read was the easiest part of reading, while figuring out the meaning of unknown words was the most difficult. Bella selected learning new vocabulary as her primary reading goal.

In early November, Bella's teacher, Libby, translated for my interview with Bella's mother who both corroborated and added additional insights to my initial understanding. Her mother confirmed Bella's interest in reading and drawing, her determination to learn new English words, and her willingness to read aloud for her. She explained that she encourages Bella to ask questions with regard to anything she is curious about. She believed that Bella had done quite well in kindergarten and first grade but began to struggle in third grade and to participate less in class. Bella's mother explained that she herself had always enjoyed reading and investigating the meaning of words both in Spanish and English. She reads work-related magazines and discusses them with her boss. In her opinion, a good reader is someone who understands what (s)he's read. In closing, Bella's mother said, "I know things because I read things," and noted that she looked to reading materials for solutions to personal problems.

Libby (Bella's teacher) spoke of Bella as a child who liked to please and who always did the best she could. She noted that she was very determined to become a successful reader, despite the challenges it presented – challenges of which Bella was well-aware. Nevertheless, she rarely participated in class and her written responses were also limited. Libby noted that Bella took far longer than any other student in her class to complete the fall reading benchmark test and scored at the "approaching proficient" level; given her instructional reading level, this was stronger than might have been expected. Bella told me she had been nervous about this test because she was uncertain what would happen if she did not do well. Libby saw Bella as a reader who is motivated to stick with a book unless she feels she is not understanding what she reads; then she'd exchange it for a more accessible book. While she certainly had friends in the classroom, Bella was reserved and business-like in her approach to peers and to her teacher.

In my initial classroom observations of Bella, she participated actively in Turn-and-Talk Time (an opportunity to process information by discussing it with a partner) and she consistently followed along in the text as her teacher read aloud to the class. Although she raised her hand to participate, Bella sometimes got discombobulated when called on and repeated what someone else had said, offered a jumbled response, or said, "Never mind" in an apparent effort to extricate herself from an attempt at participation that had somehow gone awry. When her teacher provided a sentence frame to structure student response (a common practice in this classroom), Bella appeared much more comfortable and articulate. During the

course of my first observation, Bella made a reasonable prediction and answered a low-inference comprehension question about the story they were reading. She also asked both procedural and content-oriented questions. On two occasions she expressed concern about the way social dynamics were handled in the classroom.

So, who was Bella as we entered into our working relationship? She was a child of high energy and determination, willing to do whatever it took to improve in areas that were important to her, from Four Square to reading. This was particularly evident in her approach to reading tests where, in an effort to do well, she would slave away long after other students had finished. Yet, as we began our work together, Bella had no clear connection to books. She read as much as her teacher told her to read and occasionally more but she could remember little about the books she liked and had no regular source of new and engaging titles. I later learned that her older brother was a successful student and a committed reader, but Bella never mentioned him or his reading habits in our early conversations.

There were clear strengths and challenges evident in Bella's profile. Her most significant abilities and interests involved visual, concrete, and hands-on activities such as science and art. Activities that were auditory, abstract, and/or linguistic like following directions, math, and contributing to large-group discussions proved more difficult. She was willing to take risks in these areas, as evidenced by her intense focus during tests and participation in partner sharing, so long as her efforts were not made public in any way. But when expected to read or talk to the class, she was uncomfortable and apprehensive.

As much as Bella wanted to excel in reading, she was not fully certain about what it meant to be a successful reader. On the one hand it seemed to be all about understanding. Yet the most visible measures of reading ability in the context of this school were quarterly fluency assessments and near-daily practice sessions. No doubt it was difficult to maintain one's commitment to an ideal of meaning-making – even with a teacher who embraced this focus – when the enacted curriculum supported something far different.

Bella was, from the get-go, remarkably aware of her own strengths and limitations and of the workings of the classroom in which she spent her days. She knew that reading was a challenge for her and that, at this point in time, she simply wasn't very good at it. She knew what caused her problems (essentially, meanings of difficult words) and what was easy for her (low-inference comprehension). In addition, Bella was cognizant of the ways in which her teacher assisted students who were struggling: by looking at the book they were reading, checking the level of difficulty on the Accelerated Reader system, recommending a different level if necessary, and reading with the student. She added that, were she the teacher, she would help the child find a good book and check the level of that book, too. When asked what might improve their Reading Workshop time, she suggested that if students talked more quietly, others would be able to concentrate.

Through all of this there was a certain aloofness present in Bella's personality. While she was not unpopular, she was both reserved and somewhat intense for a child her age. On several occasions she expressed concern about the social inter-workings of her classroom but they seemed impersonal and almost theoretical. Her primary relationship seemed to be with her mother and it's possible that, with this enduring relationship intact, she felt no real need to connect in a significant and personal way with adults in the academic setting.

Bella's Tactics

What tactics did Bella employ in her approach to text? First, it is important to clarify that I am not attributing to these methods a negative connotation. As discussed earlier, there is no inherent virtue in Strategic (nor vice in tactical) behaviors. Strategy is simply less context-bound and, hence, more generalizable. Many of the tactics Bella (and the other children) employed were effective as far as they went, but were ultimately not enough to serve her fully.

I'll offer a brief overview of these tactics here and explain them in more detail as they appear in the tutorial and small group sessions described in the following sections. Some of the tactics were specifically related to literacy while others were applied more generally to the world as a whole. Bella paid a great deal of attention to pictures and other text features; she viewed them as a major source of information. She also made a number of connections to other texts, particularly movies. Reading aloud was Bella's much-preferred technique of choice; silent reading was quite a struggle. She regularly asked for help – with word pronunciation and meaning, as well directions and other statements which she regularly asked me to repeat. When she felt uncomfortable about her ability to communicate her ideas, she dealt with this anxiety in several ways: asserting her knowledge in an attention-getting manner; exhibiting negative feelings such as annoyance; talking on and on in an effort to "hold the floor" until she could come around to what she wanted to say; adopting a tentative tone; simply repeating what other students had said; saying, "Never mind" in an effort to avoid having to explain herself further; rationalizing the fact that she could not provide a suitable answer; and engaging in unhelpful interactive behaviors such as bossing, talking unproductively with peers, and play-fighting.

What did I come to understand about Bella over the course of our time together? In the next section I'll look at her affective/social characteristics, her academic strengths and challenges, and the connections between the two areas. Finally, I'll look at what I came to see as the "elephant in the room" – Bella's ongoing illness during the winter.

Getting to Know Bella

As is true of all the children I studied, Bella maintained certain elements of her persona throughout the course of our time together. In other ways she changed quite significantly. I'll begin by looking at her affective and social dispositions, then examine her academic characteristics, and finally look at the built connections that served to bridge the space between the two realms.

The affective/social realm. There were two affective/social aspects of Bella's character – her sensitivity to the world around her (awareness) and her propensity for risk-taking (accepting challenges) – which served her well. The greater level of comfort she found in the tutorial setting, in contrast to our small group time, seemed to be a mixed blessing.

Awareness. Children for whom the activities of school do not come easily benefit from maintaining a stance of careful attunement: to their environment, to aspects of text that might be less important for stronger readers, and to their own strengths and challenges. By doing so, they can find clues for their own behavior. Bella was such a child.

Awareness of environment. Bella was very sensitive to the broader environment. Of the comments she made which served as evidence of this behavior, many appeared quite off-topic. They frequently occurred in less tightly controlled moments when I searched for a missing

paper, asked a nearby tutor to keep her voice down, or wondered aloud what we might best do in the few minutes we had left that day. Upon closer examination, however, every one of these comments appeared to serve a genuine purpose. Some of these benefitted her directly. On one occasion during her obsession with the Ramona Quimby series, she noticed a copy of one of the books just out of my line of vision and, against my better judgment (the text was too difficult for her at the time), negotiated its inclusion in our curriculum. Twice when I lost track of time and kept her slightly into the lunch break or after classes had been dismissed early for parent-teacher conferences, she noticed movement outside our window and alerted me to the problem. As I constructed the books into which they pasted the text of their research and illustrations, she pointed out with some consternation that her book seemed to be smaller than the others. And having received a treat from me for returning some paperwork, as well as an admonition not to eat it in the presence of others, she explained that there was a special place where she could go and consume the snack unnoticed by friends or yard duty personnel.

In other cases, sensitivity to the environment served more to help me or to forge a bond between us. On two occasions, she let me know that my video recorder had been bumped in such a way that one or more of the students were outside the frame of the camera. I was forever misplacing markers and other writing utensils and she sometimes discovered them. She noticed my name wherever it might be written, particularly when this led to the discovery that I was not just Ms. Jaeger, but Elizabeth. I looked high and low for a missing letter tile; she found it. One day, the school drum corps saw their way to practice nearby. She knew not only what they were doing, but their rather precise location.

Awareness of text features and level of difficulty. Similarly, Bella attended carefully to text features, a tactic that served her well. On occasion she noticed the presence of a pronunciation guide or subtitles. But despite the fact that her dependence on them seemed to diminish over time, pictures (typically photographs since we primarily read non-fiction) were her favored source of information. Sometimes when I asked her a question (e.g., what's a *prescription*?) she would point to a picture in response, and sometimes when I noted something in a picture (e.g., a jellyfish), she provided a name for it.

Bella was fascinated with maps. One day we were reading a book about the ocean and she saw something in the picture that she didn't recognize. At first I thought she was referring to the lines of latitude and longitude and I tried rather hopelessly to explain. In the end it turned out that she had noticed some very tiny islands. When that question was settled she shifted her attention to the equator. We got a globe and talked about the northern and southern hemispheres. It soon became evident however that Bella was thrown off by the sheer magnitude of Earth-in-Reality as compared to Earth-as-Globe. She pointed to an interior body of water and asked if it were a puddle; when I explained that it was a lake, she was quite taken aback. Finding Mexico, a recognizable landmark, seemed to re-orient her.

Not only was Bella able to notice the details of pictures, she could employ that awareness to form connections to the content of the text or to other students. Prior to reading aloud *More Than Anything Else* (a picture book about Booker T. Washington by Marie Bradby) I asked the Book Circle group to think about the title and the picture and make predictions about what they thought might happen in the story. Bella noted the picture of Booker holding a book tight to his chest and made the prediction that it was that book that he wanted "more than

anything else." She made similar predictions linking picture and print on at least three other occasions. When other students read aloud the books about animals that they had researched and written, she attended to the minutia in their pictures as well, complimenting one child for his attention to detail.

Nevertheless, Bella utilized picture support on her own terms. I regularly asked her to conduct a "picture walk" prior to brainstorming a list of what she already knew about the topic of the selection we were about to read. This rarely seemed to help her access her prior knowledge. Similarly, drawing her attention to photographs that I thought would help to illuminate the meaning of key terms (e.g., the *foundation* of a house) was not always effective. If the picture was going to help her or intrigue her, she seemed to know this immediately, and if not, she had little interest in it.

When we completed reading a book in our guided reading time, I asked Bella to assess the level of difficulty (easy, just right, or hard) and she was able to do so. In addition she could provide a reason for her assessment, ranging from word pronunciation to overall understanding. Most frequently she attended to whether or not she knew the meanings of difficult words. We frequently read texts that may have been above Bella's instructional level. I was anxious about this and sometimes suggested that I read aloud to her or that we abandon a book in mid-stream, but Bella was undaunted. Clearly, she was able to tolerate a higher level of difficulty than most readers. Soon, I learned that she would tell me spontaneously if she was out of her depth and, farther along in our work together, could specify what caused problems for her – lengthy proper names, an unusual word usage, etc. As noted above, she exercised the same good judgment during self-select reading time in her classroom – choosing a new book when, in a situation that provided less support, she couldn't understand what was going on.

Awareness of self. Not only did Bella demonstrate an awareness of her environment and the texts she read, she also had a reasonably accurate sense of her own strengths and challenges. From the very beginning of our work together, Bella understood that dealing with difficult vocabulary was her primary issue. Despite the fact that her initial evaluation of her reading skill was "OK," and while not unwilling to acknowledge her difficulties, she was quite positive about herself as a reader. As we completed each new book, I asked her to tell me something that she had done well and she always had a ready reply. The most interesting thing about her responses was that, almost without exception, they reflected the content of our focus strategy/skill for that day: while we worked on increasing her vocabulary, she commented on the number of words she had figured out; when we focused on self-monitoring, she told me she had been able to notice times when she didn't understand and used "fix-up" strategies to repair the breakdown in comprehension; and when we focused on generating and supporting opinions, she noted that she had had many ideas.

During our post-discussion debrief in Book Circle, Bella effectively portrayed both the group's accomplishments and shortfalls. Over the course of several weeks, she commented that group members participated willingly, raised their hands to speak, stayed on the topic, and ignored the video camera. However, she also suggested that other students made noises during the discussion and, on the flip side, that they were unable to ignore the distractions around them – yet another link to her awareness of the environment discussed earlier.

Interestingly, Bella's self-evaluations during small group sessions differed significantly from those offered in tutorial. At times she seemed to feel the need to "save face" in the presence of her peers. On one occasion she bragged about the number of goal certificates she had received. Another time, having heard me point out the humor in another student's drawing and with her peers in easy listening distance, she asked me if I thought one of her pictures was good; when I turned the question back to her, she stated that it was. When reviewing the students' self-selected discussion goals, Bella claimed that she had spoken clearly. Not mincing any words, another student insisted she had not; at this point she revised her original assessment to an "OK." At other times, however, she seemed harder on herself in the small group setting than she did in tutorial. She chastised herself for "messing up" as she put periods in her writing and late in the spring insisted that she continued to struggle with English and that her level of participation in her classroom had not improved.

Bella was profoundly aware of what went on around her even when, at times, she did not fully understand it. In general, this keen awareness served her well, allowing her to get her needs met and to forge connections with others. Struggling as she did to construct meaning from print on the page, she turned frequently to more supportive text features, particularly pictures. Bella was usually at least as effective as I was at gauging the level of text difficulty that would challenge without frustrating her. She also was positive but realistic in her assessment of her own strengths and limitations and equally perceptive in evaluating the behavior of other students in our small group. Her self-assessment in the group setting vacillated between an apparent need to project a less flawed image and, on the other hand, a greater judgmentalism about her shortcomings. This was likely related to the fact that she seemed generally more comfortable working with me one-on-one than she did with her peers, a topic that will be addressed directly in the next section.

Accepting challenges. The path to literacy has not been easy for Bella. Yet she was nearly always ready for a challenge and rarely shrank from a demanding goal. On the very first day of our work together, she selected as her goal the area of reading that was most difficult for her – understanding the meaning of uncommon words. It was important to her to measure her progress and, when offered a range of choices about the number of new words she would shoot for, she selected not twenty or thirty but fifty. Later, when progress toward another goal was thwarted by a class camping trip, she resisted the temptation to scale back on her expectations even though I was more than willing to allow this. Bella was also committed to becoming more facile in her pronunciation of multi-syllable words and flat-out refused to switch to a less challenging book when the going got tough. Once again her desire to see clear and measurable progress prompted her to ask me to make a list of challenging words about a topic of interest (weather) and allow her to read it over and over again, in an effort to achieve what was, in my estimation, an insanely fast speed. She set her own less formal goals as well. Having insisted on reading aloud even during self-select reading time for our first month of work together, she drew my attention to the fact that she was reading silently one day; when I asked her why she replied, "I want to see if I could try."

In a similar vein, while other students often preferred that I read aloud to them or that we trade off pages when dealing with comprehension strategies, Bella typically chose to read independently. Once it became evident that, due to its level of difficulty, we could read one of

the Ramona Quimby books (her passion at the time) only if I read aloud, she became less rigid about this, but with other texts she held fast. After some time, I realized that, unless the book was far too difficult, listening to me read was actually more challenging for her than reading herself. As will be noted later, Bella struggled with the auditory learning channel and hearing herself reading aloud seemed to help her stay focused and engaged.

Bella was tenacious in her approach to reading. Every time I asked her whether she wanted to continue reading – whether in guided or self-select reading time – she chose to forge ahead. This occurred at least ten times over the course of thirty tutorial sessions. And Bella was amazingly adept at dealing with whatever frustration she felt. There were times when she was clearly exasperated by her difficulty pronouncing or understanding words, by her uncertainty about an assignment, or by her inability to articulate her reasons for a prediction or an opinion. She would typically sigh, take a breath, and then plunge back into the task at hand.

There was one undertaking in which Bella's persistence seemed to fail her. She had been absent for a couple of Study Circle sessions and was well-behind others in her research and drafting. We took some time during one of our tutorial sessions in an effort to bring her up to speed, but this didn't seem to be enough to raise her self-confidence. At one point I recommended that she add something to her writing; she declined. Then I suggested that, if I photocopied her notes she could take them home and work on her draft there; she was uninterested. Finally, it became evident that she had included in her draft some words she didn't really understand. Certain that she would accept the challenge, I told her that she could either use the dictionary to help her with the meanings or take those sentences out of her piece; out they went. In retrospect, I believe there were a number of factors involved in this situation. Despite her insistence that she enjoyed writing, this was not a strength for her. In addition, the small group venue did not allow for the same intensity of support that might have made the project more doable. Finally, the fact that she was beginning a period of less-than-good-health at this time seemed to lower her frustration threshold.

There were, of course, times when Bella's energy and enthusiasm seemed to wane; she would sigh or whine or seem annoyed with me. But these instances were few and far between. By and large, as long as she felt she had the support she needed, Bella pushed herself to set and work toward challenging goals. She knew that she was behind most of her peers in reading, she knew that I was in a position to help change that, and she was willing to go the distance to make it happen.

Control and comfort in the tutorial setting. As is true for all of us, the three students described in this dissertation each had locales in which they were more and less comfortable and in control. Bella seemed most at ease in the tutorial setting. She was more able to grasp instructional processes, more willing to assert herself in productive ways, and more confident in her level of knowledge. Unlike Ethan, for example, I believe she could have made as much progress without the small group work. She and I built a working relationship that served her well.

Understanding – and not understanding – process. There were times when Bella was clear about how things worked in tutorial and times when she was confused. For example, she thought we should record the books we read together on her home reading log and she wanted to make vocabulary flash cards for words she already knew the meaning of. Initially, she didn't

seem to understand how accessing her prior knowledge would help her connect to new information in the texts she read, and she questioned whether her knowledge was still correct when it was not stated in the new text.

This confusion was far more common in the small group setting, however. Despite the fact that we began each session by playing Wheel of Fortune (a puzzle game that requires players to use both letter sounds and context clues to figure out a message), Bella had not yet mastered the game procedures after two months. She also had difficulty with many of the processes associated with our research and book-making project: copying directly from the research materials while taking notes, inappropriately employing procedural writing conventions (e.g., first, next, then) while writing a non-procedural account, asking me several times which of her peers served as the consulting expert for particular aspects of writing despite the fact that the list of experts was posted, and struggling with determining page breaks for her book. She had difficulty writing questions and generating possible answers when preparing for discussion and misunderstood the way we used a "Talking Rock" for turn-taking during the discussion.

Exerting control. Bella asserted herself in ways that significantly affected our work. She argued with me over matters large and small. Initially, it seemed most of these disagreements fell into the realm of the petty. She insisted that she should be able to substitute the word *the* for *an* and wanted to call the *meteorologist* a *scientist* – all of her preferred terms selected because they came more naturally to her. In cases like this, she often relented easily. Upon closer reflection, however, most of her points of contention were connected to concerns that were quite important to her. She viewed herself as a responsible student and so when I chastised her for wasting time or finagling her way out of after school ELD Club, she was not about to let me get away with that critique. She lacked confidence in her writing abilities, so when I noted that she had miscopied information from the notes I had helped her take, she was quick to blame it on my less-than-exemplary handwriting. She was sensitive about reading accuracy, so when I corrected her after a miscue that I feared would undermine her ongoing understanding, she insisted that she had read it correctly the first time. When Bella felt wronged she was not willing to give up without a fight.

Bella also succeeded in altering the process of our lessons in significant ways. Over the course of thirty tutorial and thirty small group sessions, she made nearly a hundred attempts to control the way events transpired, almost two-thirds of which occurred in our one-on-one work. At first I viewed many of these attempts as questions because they were worded and intoned as such. But eventually I came to understand that she was not, in fact, asking for information about how things *were*, but making clear how she believed things *should* be. The following exchange occurred just prior to her self-select reading period, a time when most students read silently as I had encouraged them to do:

Elizabeth: You just tell me when you want to stop [reading], OK?

Bella: Am I supposed to read out loud?

Elizabeth: Nope.

Bella: Can I read out loud?

Elizabeth: Sure, you can if you want to, but I won't stop you or anything, OK?

In the small group, Bella's attempts sometimes revolved around influencing the finer details of the way we worked together – reminding me when I had forgotten something, objecting to minor changes in routine, advising me on where children should sit or what color marker I should use. But the major focus of her efforts related to her preference for reading aloud. During the sixteen Book Circle sessions, she made eight attempts to get me to allow students to read Round Robin-style. I patiently explained that I never had kids read aloud without reading silently first, but she was relentless. Eventually, I suggested that she (and any other student) could practice a part to read to the group another day, but she showed no enthusiasm for this alternative. When it finally became evident that I was not going to back down, she settled for reading along with me instead.

Bella's assertiveness with respect to process was more frequent and more productive in the tutorial setting. I suspect that part of the reason she struggled less with instructional processes in this venue was because she felt more in control of the way those processes functioned there. Beginning with the second tutorial session when she stated, "I want to learn how to read hard words," Bella made her preferences known in ways that shaped our work together in fruitful ways. She frequently used phrases like "I want . . ." and "We should . . ." and often interrupted me mid-sentence to make her desires known – as evidenced by this interaction about writing her book on coyotes:

Elizabeth: So should we list some other things they eat? What's another . . .

Bella: I want to read this, this part [and she re-reads].

She was very clear about what books she wanted to read, how she wanted to read them, and when she wanted to bring that reading to a close. As time went on, she interjected predictions and opinions, alerted me to the fact that she intended to re-read a muddy passage, and explained the importance of apposition. But Bella reserved her greatest energy for practicing the list of weather-related terms she had selected to support her goal of more effectively decoding multi-syllable words. Initially it took her two minutes and fifteen seconds to read the 25 or so words and the goal she set was one minute. But long after she reached her goal, she insisted on reading the list over and over again until finally, when her rate had dropped to fourteen seconds, I told her that I didn't think I could read them any faster.

Engagement with knowledge. Bella had a complex relationship with knowledge. She sometimes doubted the information she brought to her interactions with text, yet wanted very much to be seen as knowledgeable. In the tutorial sessions her desire to *gain* knowledge seemed to trump her desire to *display* knowledge. In the small group setting, the reverse was true.

Bella's information-seeking questions varied depending on the setting. In Study Circle they typically related to the subject of her self-authored book (coyotes) or those of other children – what term was used for warthog babies and what sharks eat. Her questions in our one-on-one work together were both deeper and more wide-ranging. She wanted to know how pandas could be related to raccoons and whether cereal was made from wheat. Early on Bella was quite interested in ants, asking whether they had hands and whether the small, white grub-looking things in the picture could possibly be babies. Later her interests included hurricanes. She wondered what time of year they typically formed and why they were named

after people. She maintained this interest over time, asking for her multi-syllable word practice to be focused on weather-related terms.

On the other hand, her tactical efforts to *display* her knowledge were much more evident in the group setting. In tutorial she would sometimes say, "I know . . . " or "I remember . . ." and, on one occasion she explained what an author should have done differently when writing the book she was reading. This behavior was almost four times as frequent in the small group setting, however. In addition to the phrases noted above, she would also remark, "I've got one [an idea]! "Can I say . . .," or "I have an answer!" Generally, these efforts seemed relatively harmless, but on some occasions they crossed the line from enthusiasm to braggadocio. She boasted about things she had done, like drawing a great picture or getting many goal certificates. She tried to maneuver her way into a conversation when it was not her turn to talk, and on a couple of occasions she shouted out answers when another child had the floor.

Bossing and flirting. For all her endearing qualities, Bella could be a total pain in the neck, especially when she bossed other students around, a tactic that won her no friends. This side of her appeared in small group only. On the second day of Study Circle she informed Paul that she didn't approve of his self-selected pseudonym. She told Timmy to sit up and when he didn't respond, demanded that he pay attention. She also commented that Sam had not spoken at all that day. In future sessions, she directed Paul's spelling, Ethan's note-taking, and the cleaning-up behaviors of several students, as well as complaining about how slowly they were accomplishing the task. Eventually, she got on my nerves, as well. She stated that Paul's hand was raised, he insisted it was not, and I finally said, "I think he knows if his hand is up!"

At times, Bella – the only girl in the group – was borderline-flirtatious. One day, she got in a little pushing and poking match with Paul that was clearly more about interacting with each other than about aggression. But, more regularly, her attention was directed to Timmy. They frequently chose to sit together during Study Circle work time and the match-up was not very productive since she paid more attention to Timmy's note-taking than she did to her own. She took offense at my comment that she would know more about tigers (Timmy's chosen animal) than about coyotes by the time the unit was finished. A close analysis of the video-recordings I took during small group time alerted me to the fact that flirty exchanges were common place at this time.

While Bella was actively engaged in Study Circle and Book Circle, it was quite clear that she felt most comfortable working with me one-on-one. She felt more able to exert control over our work together in that locale and, likely as a result, it was easier for her to grasp routine protocols and other activities. Bella had a voice and was not afraid to use it, much to the betterment of our time together. In the small group setting, she seemed to feel the need to project a competent persona by drawing attention to her store of knowledge and telling others what to do, whereas in tutorial she was more likely to demonstrate gaps in that knowledge in an effort to add to it. Unlike other students, our paired work together served as the primary crucible for her literacy growth.

Summary. Bella is quite the character and many elements of her personality served her well on the path to literacy. She was very aware of the world around her – from illustrations in the books we read to the placement of my video camera to the passage of time. Of even

greater importance, she was *self*-aware, particularly of her own challenges and successes. Except when it came to writing, her own personal Waterloo, Bella never backed down from a challenge. She selected ambitious goals and worked hard until she reached them. She felt most at ease – and, I believe, made more progress – in the tutorial setting. In this locale, she felt comfortable interrupting me to negotiate the content and process of our work together. She could own up to gaps in her knowledge without the risk (real or imagined) of critique by her peers. In short, Bella could be herself – an energetic learner with high expectations for herself.

The academic realm. First and foremost, Bella viewed herself as a student. There were aspects of learning that were significant obstacles for her, primarily oral/written language and vocabulary issues. But she had clear strengths as well, and these strengths expanded over time. From early on she demonstrated herself to be more facile with higher level thinking than she was with memory-based tasks. Also, as we worked to extend her familiarity and facility with comprehension strategies, she used these more effectively and internalized them to a greater degree, allowing her to transfer these strategies from one situation to another.

Oral language and vocabulary difficulties. While she could speak social English quite fluently, Bella struggled with academic English – both receptive and expressive. It was often difficult for Bella to take in what she heard and to express what she wanted to say. In addition, academic vocabulary was, from the beginning to the end of our time together, her biggest challenge.

Oral language. Bella communicated more easily when working with me alone than she did in the small group setting. That is not to say that she was always fully clear, especially when asked to respond to questions that were unfamiliar to her. The first time I asked her to explain why she felt the book she had just completed was "just right" for her, she said, "Because um, it was, it was, um, it was good, no . . ." But generally speaking, and given sufficient time, she was able to communicate with me quite effectively. She was far less articulate in the small group setting and in her classroom. On the first day of Study Circle we were setting expectations for behavior and I asked the students to describe what the classroom would look like if students were working hard. At first Bella stated that they would be good students and, when pressed to explain what that meant, said they would be working hard. This kind of circular logic appeared more than once. Later that day she attempted to define what it meant to study by including the word *study* in her definition. Sometimes she would get flustered after several attempts to contribute and say, "Never mind!" – a tactic that she seemed to employ in an effort to extricate herself from the conversation.

Bella regularly repeated ideas she heard in group. Sometimes she would simply copy something I or one of the other students had said. During discussion, I asked Sam if he had a question. "Do you have a question, Sam?" Bella repeated. Ethan began to answer a question by saying, "I think I know . . ." and Bella cut in, "I think I know, too." Other times, there was enough of a delay between the time a statement was originally made and when Bella repeated it that I had the sense that she was unable to hold the idea in her mind long enough. By the time she spoke, what she said may truly have seemed like a new contribution. Or, she may have raised her hand, intending to say something original and, when the thought escaped her, she repeated another student's idea rather than admit she'd forgotten her own. On the day we discussed what topic they would investigate during Study Circle time, one of the students

suggested that we study space. Several minutes later, Bella raised her hand and said, "We could study, we could study, we could study space!" Clearly, it was very important to Bella that she be in the thick of any conversation we had. Providing a jumbled or repeated response was a better tactic, in her mind, than remaining silent.

Not only did Bella re-state what others said, but she regularly asked to hear things a second and even third time. These requests fell into two basic categories. Sometimes she asked me to re-read something I'd read aloud. As noted earlier, it was actually more difficult for her to listen to a text at her instructional level than it was for her to read it. I sometimes chose to do this anyway when I wanted her to get lots of practice predicting, inferring, or offering opinions in a relatively short period of time. But whenever I made that choice, I knew that it meant I would have to re-read a good deal. She also regularly asked me to restate questions I'd asked her. At times, she required a simple repetition of the question as originally worded. But at other times, she'd say, "Can you ask it a different way?" and it was evident that she didn't understand the way I'd worded the question and needed me to rephrase it using words that were more familiar to her.

Vocabulary. As noted earlier, dealing with unknown words – particularly the academic language found in the expository texts we commonly read – was Bella's greatest challenge. While she remained undaunted by this obstacle, she was very much aware of the difficulty it caused her and did not hesitate to select learning the meanings of new words as her first goal. Of the miscues Bella made over the course of our time together, over half involved words which were probably not in her oral vocabulary. Her relatively strong decoding skills got her close enough to make the short leap to a recognizable word but, if there was no word/concept to which she could connect, this didn't work. Bella was curious about words and asked a lot of questions about them. Sometimes she would run into an unknown word and ask what it meant. The word might be an uncommon word (e.g., *harvest*), a common word used in a different context (e.g., *sweep,* as in "Clouds sweep across the sky") or even a word I would have expected her to know (e.g., *pairs*, as in pairs of coyotes). Other times she would see a picture (of a yak or a jellyfish) and ask what it wa,s or have a concept in mind from a previous discussion but not remember the word that described it (e.g., government: "The, I forgot what it's . . . the person who, I forget the, gov-").

During the time we worked on self-monitoring, we discussed the fact that sometimes when we get stuck in our reading, it's due to an unknown word and sometimes the words are familiar, but the idea described by those words is troublesome. Occasionally, Bella noted difficulty with an idea, but the vast majority of the time, it was particular words which seemed to stymie her. When I told her that the sentences I was going to show her were problematic, and then presented sentences that contained words that I expected she would not know and which contained little if any helpful context clues (e.g., The man had a goatee) she was able to note which word caused the problem. But if I told her the sentence might or might not have a word that she didn't know (e.g., By the time the 49ers got back to the huddle, the team was desperate), she often insisted she understood until I pressed her about the meaning of words I suspected were unfamiliar to her. When we read pieces of extended text, she vacillated between success and failure on this task.

Bella struggled with academic language throughout the year. She continued to have difficulty following oral directions and conveying her ideas. Lack of a rich vocabulary base was also a problem. The ratio of words Bella could figure out from context to those she could not was quite low (about 1: 1). She benefited from the work we did together (the ratio during instruction on strategies for using context was .7: 1 and after instruction was 1.9: 1). But, in general, this remained a significant stumbling block – in truth the only aspect of reading that stood between her and above-average performance.

Stronger higher- than lower-level thinking. Common wisdom holds that children are not capable of higher-level thinking – analysis, synthesis, critical thought – until they are able to answer so-called literal questions. From this perspective, it makes no sense to ask children what they *think* about what they've read until they can tell you what the text *says.* Bella is walking proof that this reasoning is in error. If we consider questions about story/article details as the lowest level of comprehension, retelling/summary is a step up since it requires the reader to select more-important from less-important information and organize it in a logical manner. Inferential thinking goes beyond this, since the reader must "read between the lines," and critical/creative understanding still further, demanding judgment as well as understanding. Bella's weakest area involved attention to detail; she was much better at higher-level thinking.

When Bella struggled to understand, her difficulties were located most frequently at the word level (as noted above). Second most challenging was memory for detail. She provided incorrect information about what grade a character was in, or where the character hoped to go. Sometimes, particularly when reading expository text, she simply couldn't begin to offer an answer, as was the case when trying to explain how ants "farmed" aphids. On other occasions, she was baffled by odd syntax (e.g., "More different life forms can be found in the rainforest than anywhere else, but few people" – with "live there" implied but not stated). There were times when Bella seemed to think she remembered/understood when she actually did not, but in other instances (e.g., in discussing what ants stored in their underground chambers) she was very forthright about her difficulties.

Bella's ability to focus on and organize the most crucial information in a text depended largely on the genre. She was very good at retelling stories we read together, especially during Book Circle time. She was often the first to volunteer to begin our "tag-team" retellings and she was usually systematic and accurate in what she had to say. Getting the main points of expository text was more challenging for her. She was able to tell me the topic of the passage independently about a third of the time and had even more difficulty with explaining what the passage had to say about the topic (main idea). With support, these numbers doubled, but this remained a challenging area all year, as it did for most of the students. Less experience with reading expository text and its relatively unfamiliar text structure are likely explanations for this phenomenon.

While inferring was an area of difficulty for Bella on her initial assessments, she improved quickly, especially after selecting this as a goal early on. Before instruction, she provided meaningful answers to high-inference questions about twice as often as not. During instruction this rose to 6: 1 and once instruction was over, all her inferences were appropriate. When she did have trouble, it was generally due to disruptions in understanding at the low-inference or word levels. She practiced inferring during out tutorial sessions but was able to

transfer this ability to the small group. While discussing *More Than Anything Else*, Bella drew several key inferences. She noted that Booker had probably never been to school and that, if he did, he would probably feel both afraid and sad since he would have no friends and would be unable to do something that was expected of him – read and write.

If Bella did well with high-inference questions, she was truly in her element when asked to think critically and creatively. As was true in non-academic situations, Bella readily offered her opinion on any topic with very little prompting; on the occasions when there was a tentative quality to her answers they were far more likely to be matters of fact than of opinion.

While she practiced these skills within the tutorial setting, she exhibited them most robustly during our Book Circle discussions. At times her comments were breath-taking. As we talked about the teacher who helps a girl learn to read in *Thank You, Mr. Falker* (by Patricia Polacco), Bella first noted that Mr. Falker was serious because he was wondering if Tricia needed help, and that he had a certain look in his eyes when he was thinking of her. She went on to say that he was also mysterious; while she insisted that she couldn't explain why she saw him in this way, she eventually asserted that he was different from other people – possibly from the other teachers who had failed to help Tricia learn to read. In addition, Mr. Falker seemed to appear at the school from out of nowhere and this could have influenced Bella's thinking. We read "Slower Than the Rest," a short story by Cynthia Rylant about a boy (Leo) who struggled with academics and then won a speaking award when he brought his turtle (Charlie) to school for Prevent Forest Fires Week. During our discussion Bella claimed that Leo may have loved Charlie because he had some sense that Charlie would help him to "be fast." Later she suggested that the other children would be more likely to help Leo now that he'd won an award and also that he would be in a better position to help himself. And during our discussion of "My Very Strange Teeth," a story from *Stories Julian Tells* (Cameron, 1989), Bella remarked that Julian should charge the other children money to see his unusual teeth because that would balance out the ridicule he had probably experienced and because he could use the money to help his family.

Bella's low-inference understanding was certainly more than adequate so long as she could grasp the meanings of individual words. Her retelling was strong and her ability to discern the main idea in expository text was evolving. But it was thinking – within and outside the box – that was her true strength and, it seemed, her true interest.

Effective and internalized comprehension strategies. In contemporary classrooms, especially those implementing scripted reading curricula, so much energy goes into decoding and fluency instruction that very little time is left over to help students grasp both what it means to understand text and how to go about constructing that understanding. Comprehension instruction, to the extent that it appears at all, tends to jump willy-nilly from one strategy to another. There is rarely time to insure that children comprehend the strategy, the way to use it, the situations in which it is most beneficial, and whether or not they have employed it successfully. There is a lot of assigning (e.g., Summarize the first page of the article) and very little instruction. The comprehension strategy work I did with Bella was both flexible and systematic; ultimately, she experienced a decrease in the use of tactics and an increase in strategy use.

As noted earlier, tactics are those approaches that are highly context-bound and yet, ironically, depend on knowledge which is relatively far-removed from the text at hand. While they can be very effective, tactics are not as easily transferrable from one text or situation to another. These include the following:

- Reading aloud to maintain focus (depends on being in an environment where this does not distract others);
- Asking for help (depends on having access to a helper);
- Attending to visuals within the text (depends on reading a text that has such visuals – uncommon in chapter books, for example); and
- Making connections to other texts (depends on knowing those texts).

Over the course of our time together, Bella's reliance on the first tactic did not diminish. To the very end, she had great difficulty maintaining focus while reading silently. She used the sound of her own voice to block out the noises (even relatively minor ones) that distracted her. However, Bella relied less on the remaining three tactics as time went on. She asked half as many clarifying questions in the last third of our sessions as she did in the first. Bella commented on pictures and other visual features an average of more than five times in each of our first ten sessions and less than one time per session in our last ten sessions. Of the seventeen instances in which Bella made connections to other texts (most commonly movies) thirteen occurred in the first ten sessions and none in the last.

In contrast, Bella's use of strategies increased over time. These included predicting and use of "fix-ups" (reading ahead, re-reading, skipping the word, etc.). Bella was no more likely to make predictions at the end of our time together than she did during the time when this was our instructional focus. What changed was her willingness to do so spontaneously and her ability to transfer what she'd learned from the tutorial to the small group setting. As we prepared to read *Thank You, Mr. Falker* in Book Circle, Bella offered several predictions. She suggested that the book would be "about trouble." When I asked her why, she explained that the words *thank you* in the title and the picture of a girl on the cover scratching her head led her to that conclusion. Later, she predicted that the children in her new school would laugh at Tricia because she was unable to read.

Similarly, there was an increase in Bella's unprompted use of "fix-up" strategies. We worked informally on using context to figure out word meanings at the beginning of our time together and then revisited these strategies in a more formal way in our last six sessions. Bella's preferred strategy was most certainly re-reading, something she'd employed since day one. This accounted for 35 of Bella's 51 instances of fix-up uses (25 of the 27 spontaneous ones). She also experimented with reading ahead or skipping the word (both only when prompted to do so), changing rate, and using picture clues. She seemed to be disinclined to continue on without fully grasping the meaning of what she had read, even when an explanation followed and it would have been to her great benefit to do so. She employed these strategies most during times of instruction. Nevertheless, the amount of prompting required to encourage her to use them decreased quite dramatically from more than 50% in the first third of our work to less than 20% near the end.

Use of these strategies served Bella well, particularly when the problem in question was related to her struggles with vocabulary. There was a decrease in the percentage of meaning-

based miscues she made from 64% to 54% over the course of the intervention. She also asked fewer questions about word meanings (fourteen in the first third and five in the last). And the ratio of known to unknown words increased from .7: 1 during the instructional period to almost 2: 1 after. Not only was she learning and practicing these strategies, but she was applying them in an effort to address her most pressing challenge.

At three points during our work together, I asked Bella to read a four-part fable, one segment at a time. After she read the first part, I asked her to tell me what was going on in her mind as she read, evaluate whether or not she felt she understood the story so far, do a retelling, and make a prediction about what would happen next. In the first selection (third grade reading level), Bella struggled to read words that were, I suspect, outside her oral vocabulary. She told me that she made pictures in her mind as she read and was very aware of both word and idea confusion. She came to understand the ending of the story only with substantial support. For the second selection (fourth grade level), she told me that, in addition to image-making, she used reading ahead and re-reading as methods to deal with comprehension breakdown. She made reasonable predictions and, with some difficulty, came to understand the rather subtle ending. By the third selection (fifth grade level), her understanding was virtually flawless, including specific details. She was clear about what words and phrases were obstacles for her and dealt with these problems by trying to substitute another word or skipping it. In the context of a think aloud, Bella's ability to reflect on her metacognitive processes increased over time, as did her execution of the various strategies she had learned.

I had Bella complete the Metacomprehension Strategies Index before we began working together and after our sessions were finished. Initially she had a score of seven out of a possible twenty-five – not much more than chance. She did reasonably well on predicting and self-questioning, but very poorly on all the other strategies. By June, her score was eighteen and her only areas of weakness were previewing before reading and use of prior knowledge. This assessment is problematic in a number of ways.[9] These concerns notwithstanding, this was a remarkable improvement.

These assessments and observations lend credence to the assertion that Bella was a more strategic reader by the end of the study. While she initially depended more on tactics such as connecting to visuals and to other texts, by spring she was more likely to employ strategies like predicting, self-monitoring and use of "fix-ups." In addition to learning a number of new strategies, she also internalized these more effectively and was better able to transfer what she'd learned to the small group setting.

Summary. Bella had her share of academic struggles. They were predominantly centered on issues of language (difficulty with both expressive and receptive forms). Nevertheless, over the course of the intervention she became more articulate and learned to deal more productively with unknown words. This in combination with a diminished

[9] The assessment is long and the questions are very repetitive, always beginning with one of the following stems: Before I begin reading/While I'm reading/After I've read, it's a good idea to . . . Of even greater concern is the fact that answers that would be correct in one section (say, Before I begin reading . . .) are listed as possible (incorrect) answers for questions in another section (say, While I'm reading . . .).

dependence on tactics and an increasing use of strategies allowed her to shine in other ways, particularly high-inference and critical/creative understanding.

Connecting the affective/social and academic realms: Stronger bonds to academics than to people. There was, throughout our work together, little uncertainty about Bella's focus. She was there to learn and that was where she directed the great preponderance of her energy, interest, and enthusiasm. In this setting, she began her strong connection to series books and took every opportunity to link our work together to what was going on in her classroom. And she found ways to form bonds with peers that were based more on academic similarities than social ones.

Enthusiasm and interest. Many aspects of our curriculum captured Bella's imagination. Often she would respond to something that sparked her enthusiasm with "Oh!" She appreciated the opportunity to generate topics for Study Circle research, learn an interesting fact about sea urchins, draw pictures for her book, and choose a goal option.

Bella was excited about selecting goals to work on (especially predicting and decoding multi-syllable words) and, most especially, about the certificates the students received after reaching a goal. These certificates were not fancy; they were printed on paper that was a step up from common printer paper, decorated with a border, and signed by me. But, for Bella, they represented a job well done and she was happy to share tangible evidence of this accomplishment with family members. In addition, she always requested that I present her with the certificate during small group time so that her peers would know what she'd done. If I got caught up in the other activities of the day and forgot to give them out, she would remind me, and she was also known to compare the number of certificates she had earned with others.

By the end of November, Bella was also expressing great enthusiasm for books. When I talked with her about going to the library to find books on topics that interested her and brought in new books to choose from for her independent reading time, she was delighted. And then the Ramona obsession hit. After a friend shared one of these books with her, Bella began to talk about this series of books by Beverly Cleary whenever there was an opening in the conversation. She searched the shelves of the school library for them and she brought them home. However, I'm quite certain that she didn't actually read them; never did she say anything specific about the plot or characters of these books. We began reading *Ramona and Her Father* (Cleary, 1977) during guided reading time, but she had trouble grasping the concept of Ramona's father losing his job and of Ramona's efforts to earn money to help out. Despite all indicators to the contrary, she continued to insist that the book was not too difficult, even to read independently at school or at home.

In May, Bella discovered the *Judy Moody* series (McDonald, 2000-2011) and she was hooked. These stories of a perky but rather temperamental child (not wholly unlike Bella herself) captivated her and were well within her independent reading level. When called back to group after silent reading time, Bella was known to keep reading while walking to another area of the room. When *Dress as a Book Character* day came around, no one was surprised at her selection. This series seemed to serve as a transitional space for Bella. By the end of the year, her reading horizons were expanding and, during the summer, she moved on to more challenging books.

Bella also showed enthusiasm for the books written by her Study Circle peers. All the students were to read their books aloud to our little group as practice for reading to their classmates. Ethan was absent that day, so I modeled the read aloud process using his book on sharks. Bella listened with rapt attention. When I read that sharks can smell blood from a mile away and that they live in every ocean, she responded with her characteristic, "Oh!" and wide-eyed gaze. She smiled when I read Ethan's "About the Author" page and she heard that he enjoyed Four Square as much as she did. She complimented his pictures and pronounced the facts he included in the book "interesting."

Connections to classroom curriculum. Bella frequently noted connections between what we were working on in tutorial or small group time and classroom instruction. This began on the very first day of tutorial when she noted that one of the vocabulary words we had selected for her to study was also on her spelling list for the week. She talked about reading a Cam Jansen mystery and an Amber Brown book (Danziger, 1995-2004) in her class Book Club, singing a song called "City of Immigrants" (when we read a book on immigration), and studying the Gold Rush.

Bella particularly liked talking about reading skills that sparked her interest. In October, her class did a study of idioms (culminating in dressing as idioms for the school Halloween parade); during this time, Bella would regularly point out idioms in the texts we read together, intending to tell her teacher about them. In spring, she became enamored of apposition. She provided a clear definition, explained when she used it, and requested that I add it to our list of fix-up strategies.

Sometimes Bella noted "connections" that were clearly off-topic. She announced the arrival of Opposite Day, told me about a doctor who was visiting her classroom, complained that a substitute teacher was mean, and reported that they had been to camp the previous week. What interested me about these diversions was that they seemed to serve one or more of two purposes. Sometimes they came at the beginning of a class session as a way of making a bridge from the instructional space she had left to the one she was entering. Other times they were time fillers; they came up when I was looking for something or managing papers and Bella filled the gap with chit-chat.

It was far less common for Bella to speak directly of her teacher. In fact, this occurred only five times across all our sessions. Even when she talked about Libby, there was an academic connection. Bella seemed most interested in Libby's membership in a book club – who was in the club and what they read. Both Libby and I felt that there was a certain distance between us and Bella – that the foundation of our relationships with her was more academic than personal.

Connecting with peers. Bella's relationship with her peers was complex. At times it seemed that she felt a strong bond with other children. At other times, she seemed to view them more as an obstacle to her academic success than as a source of support. These relationships did seem to evolve in a positive direction over time.

Bella could be affectionate toward her peers. At times she expressed concern for them. She worried that we might choose a topic for our Study Circle research that others would not agree with, making them "sad." When Ethan moved away and the children made cards for him, Bella wrote that she hoped he would attend a "nice school." Bella was also known to provide

encouragement to other children. When someone made an erroneous guess for the Wheel of Fortune puzzle, she might say, "Good job!" and informed Ethan that the reason people asked him challenging questions about information on sharks was because "you're smart." She congratulated a child who earned his first goal certificate, following up with a pat on the back and, when a new student joined the group, she greeted him warmly.

On a number of occasions, however, Bella seemed to find her peers downright annoying and, of her expressions of annoyance, three-quarters of them were in the small group setting. One day, she responded to Sam's Wheel of Fortune success with the comment, "How come HE knows?" But she reserved her greatest irritation for occasions when she had an appropriate answer, I called on another child, and that child provided the same idea she had intended to offer. In these situations, her tactical efforts to display knowledge were thwarted. In one such instance, she looked annoyed and when I noted that I imagined she had known that piece of information also, she nodded grumpily. Oddly, this annoyance seemed to be directed more toward the other child than toward me.

An interesting transition seemed to occur in late March. Bella's outbursts of irritation toward her peers (a tactic that she also directed toward me during tutorials) disappeared and she seemed to be trying on a new role, that of consultant. The transition seemed to coincide with the arrival of two new students in our group. One day, we were discussing "click and clunk," our terms for noting when the reading was going well (click) and when it was problematic (clunk). Bella, who had been working on self-monitoring for some time, asked to explain these terms to a new student and was effective in doing so. A few weeks later, Timmy (who tended to have good and bad periods) had been having a particularly off day. The students were selecting books for silent reading time and Bella went over to ask him if needed help finding one to his liking.

While Bella's relationships with her peers improved over the course of our work together, she continued to seem most comfortable interacting with them in ways that had an academic focus. She was interested in the books they wrote and the books they read. As spring wore on, Bella seemed to be establishing a stronger and stronger bond with a girl in her class who had a very serious attitude toward school. By summer they were hiking together with their teacher, an activity which seemed to be the highlight of her summer.

Summary. Rose & Rudolph (2006) suggest that, while boys tend to select friends who like to do the same things, girls are more likely to buddy up with peers who like to process relationships together. This did not seem to be the case with Bella. She saved her greatest enthusiasm for academic pursuits and her strongest connections to others centered on those pursuits. She was very enthusiastic about the goal-setting process and wanted her peers to witness her achievement. She delighted in particular book series, at least one of which was suggested by a friend. She liked to note links between our work in tutorial and her classroom curriculum and seemed to connect both to her teacher and to me primarily in conjunction with these interests. Even her adoption of the helper role had as its foundation the intention to assist others to more easily navigate academic activities.

The elephant in the living room: Illness and absence. On average 10% of children in the early elementary grades are chronically absent from school; that is, depending on locale, between 5% and 25% of these children miss at least 10% of instructional time (Chang &

Romero, 2008). Add to this the number of children who come to school sick, and the extent of the problem is even greater. When children stay home, whether due to illness or for other reasons, they miss key instruction and may fall behind. But what we are slow to acknowledge is that even if they do come to school, their level of energy and engagement may be such that they are unable to participate fully in classroom life.

Bella was commonly fifteen to twenty minutes late for school (for reasons her teachers never completely understood) and had more than her share of absences. These absences frequently fell on Fridays (the day of our small group meetings); her mother did not work that day and I began to wonder whether keeping Bella home allowed them to spend more time together.

Of greater concern to me, however, was Bella's drop in energy during the winter when she seemed to be at least not completely well for long stretches of time. Bella spoke just as much in our sessions together, but there were other changes. She had more difficulty understanding processes and word meanings, and yet she asked fewer clarifying questions, which put me in the position of having to figure out what she understood and what she didn't; consequently, more time had to be spent explaining. She was more likely to tell me that activities were too difficult for her and to express frustration with her work. The child who originally (and ultimately) was very assertive – wondering about the direction lessons were going to take, arguing with me when she felt wronged, displaying her knowledge, and taking charge whenever she could – became more passive at this time. She noted fewer connections to classroom experiences, to her family, and to me.

When Bella felt healthier in the spring, her usual energy re-emerged. She made great progress over the course of our time together, but I couldn't help but wonder how far we could have gone had she been in peak performance mode all year long. It is uncommon, I believe, to consider the impact of less-than-complete health for children who struggle to learn, yet for three of the four children I studied, this was a major factor.

Revisiting Bella

When re-assessed in June, Bella's instructional level was somewhere between fourth and mid-fifth grade level, depending again on the genre of the text (narrative stronger than expository) and the method of reading (oral reading stronger than silent). At this point, her listening comprehension was actually weaker than her reading comprehension. In analyzing Bella's miscues and understanding of text, her only remaining challenge was with vocabulary. The number of miscues that broke syntactical rules diminished by half and those that were semantically unacceptable dropped by 20%. Oddly, her score on the maze test did not increase. Fewer miscues involved sight words (down by a third) and decoding issues (down by about half). The number of vocabulary-related miscues increased four-fold, likely due to the more challenging texts she was reading. Bella correctly decoded all the multi-syllable words on the Names Test (Cunningham, 1990). As noted earlier, her think alouds were richer and more strategic and her score on the Metacomprehension Strategies Index increased dramatically.

Bella believed that there had been changes in her reading over the course of our work together. She had learned a number of new things: inferring, figuring out word meanings, getting the main idea, and forming opinions. She noted that she had begun to read faster and more smoothly although we had never specifically worked on this. She enjoyed the Wheel of

Fortune puzzles; Making Words (Cunningham & Cunningham, 1992)/Making Big Words (Cunningham & Hall, 1994) – a technique for encoding; reading texts; writing and illustrating books; and setting/working towards goals. In her classroom, she was very interested in the Literature Circle process, enjoying in particular writing questions for and participating in discussion.

In addition to her preference for art and science, Bella added reading, writing, math, and cooking. Her career goals were now just as multi-faceted with thoughts of becoming a cook and a scientists as well as an artist. She was somewhat more comfortable reading aloud in front of her peers and now felt great about fluency testing. Of the sixteen activity options, playing an individual sport (Four Square) was now her first choice and going on the Internet her second choice; writing was now her fourth choice and reading her fifth. This seemed to conflict with the fact that she had added reading and writing to her list of enjoyed school subjects. I suspect one or both of two factors may have been at work here: she may simply have been interested in many more things than in the past and/or she was more honest with me than she had originally been.

Bella was much clearer about what it means to be a good reader. She viewed coming to an understanding of and learning from text as the primary purposes for reading, and stated that her own particular reasons included having fun and finding information. In contrast to her statements in the fall, she believed that someone who reads slowly but understands is a better reader than a fast, accurate reader who is confused. She explained that it was not important to read every word correctly and, in fact, that if a reader focused primarily on accuracy, this might detract from meaning-making. Bella now considered her friend Joanna to be the best reader she knew because she reads carefully and understands what she reads. She believed that all students could become successful readers if they were given more time to read.

Bella's connections with others that centered on her reading behavior seemed to diminish over time. While she had begun reading for longer and longer periods, she reported than her mother no longer helped her (possibly because she no longer needed assistance), her sister and brother no longer read with her, and she no longer talked with anyone at home about what she was reading. Her new friend Joanna was, however, very interested in reading and I suspect that they talked about this shared interest.

Bella's connections to books, however, grew stronger and stronger. She had a clear memory for books she'd recently read and had favorite books and authors – all series books such as Judy Moody, Ramona, and Amber Brown. When asked what she liked to read about, she named a genre (fantasy) rather than a topic (Christmas) as she had done in the fall. It was evident, however, that she was on the lookout for new reading options; she stated that she would read more if she could find books she was really interested in.

Bella now viewed herself as a great reader because, she said, she was reading at a higher level, and thought that others also saw her as a great reader because her teacher had told her so. She believed that reading long words was now the easiest part of reading, while reading silently was the most difficult.

Libby allowed her students to direct their own parent conferences in the spring, making herself available to "consult" as needed. After her conference, Bella translated as I interviewed her mother. She commented that Bella was now a very engaged reader – that she would

frequently go to her room to read and only reluctantly come for dinner when called. Her mother even had to remind her to look at the floor rather than her book while walking! She noted that she was reading more than ever before without tiring and that, when her mother asked her to describe what she'd read, Bella was able to do so. When I explained that her daughter had learned many new strategies for dealing with difficulty as she read, Bella asked to tell her mother about the one she had learned most recently.

By January, Libby noted that Bella spontaneously talked with her about the goals she was working on with me. She was participating in class more and seemed more confident. She continued to slave over the benchmark tests but was scoring higher. When we spoke in June, Libby noted that Bella had also grown in her ability to decode longer words and in fluency – that she "sounds like anyone else" in terms of tone and smoothness. She commented that, while Bella was still sometimes confused by what she'd read, her understanding had definitely increased and she was particularly good at retelling. She believed that Bella was really beginning to see herself as a reader.

When I visited Bella's classroom in November and December, she still seemed to live around the edges of literacy instruction. She was attentive and read off-and-on, but she had difficulty grasping the skills (e.g., inferring) that they were learning and needed to be "brought back" to the task at hand on a regular basis. By January, however, the situation had changed significantly. She participated actively in class, tracked along as Libby read aloud in their Open Court text, asked relevant questions, and worked diligently with a partner. She still benefitted from occasional teacher check-ins, but had reached the point where she could fully engage in classroom curriculum.

Remaining Tactics and New Strategies

Of the tactics that came naturally to Bella early on, which did she continue to employ in June? In short, very few. Reading aloud continued to be her much-preferred reading technique, although she now insisted that if her surroundings were quiet enough she could read silently and still understand. Other tactics – talking on and on, asking for things to be repeated – occurred occasionally but not commonly.

The remaining tactics were largely replaced with more effective Strategies. For her typical response of "Never mind," Bella now substituted the interjection, "Wait!" To a certain degree, this may have reflected her anxiety about being heard, but it also alerted those around her that she was a force to be reckoned with. Books were now friendly artifacts that were there to serve Bella rather than stymie her. She knew enough about the ways books worked to make her way through them in an engaging and productive way. By summer's end, she had even begun to trust that once you had gotten what there was to get out of a particular type of book (series books, for example) there were always others on the horizon waiting for you and, most importantly, accessible to you. Bella was less concerned about decoding, largely due to the fact that she had more systematic strategies for figuring out how to pronounce multi-syllable words. She also now had a wealth of internalized comprehension strategies – especially predicting, inferring, and using fix-ups – that she employed effectively and flexibly. Bella adopted a more relaxed attitude to literacy and to me: she focused less on details; was less concerned with controlling the process of our work together (seeming content with the

routines we'd cultivated,) yet also less tentative in her responses; and offered more off-topic comments that allowed me to know more about her as a person as well as a student.

In Her Element

In this segment I describe two vignettes from our tutorial work that, in my mind, define who Bella was and is – a truly remarkable child whose energy and enthusiasm shaped our work together. The first is a session early on in our partnership and the second is from the day that I explained to Bella that our time together was nearing its end.

Thunder and lightning. We began our 8 November session by previewing a book on thunder and lightning. Bella jumped right in with a question. When I attempted to return to the book preview, she asked yet another – and this practice went on throughout the reading.

> Bella: I don't, why does the thunder, does the thunder and lightning, it's just straight like but doesn't be like um like to the um, to the, the sky?
>
> Elizabeth: I think we'll find that out as we read. I'm going to show you some more pictures first and see if this reminds you of anything that you know.
>
> Bella: Does the thunder and lightning, does it, when it comes down, comes all the way over like here? (points to a picture) If it stops in a house, if there's people inside would they die?

Bella had clear ideas about what she wanted to learn from this selection and expected answers sooner rather than later.

After the preview, I asked if she had anything to add to the list of what she already knew.

> Bella: I know it's that because you could get, um, electricity? (meaning electrocuted, I surmised)
>
> Elizabeth: So are you saying that it's dangerous?
>
> Bella: Yeah, dangerous.
>
> As we read, Bella noticed words in bold print. She used her previous experience with this text feature to predict its current purpose.
>
> Bella: Why are these like a . . .
>
> Elizabeth: Why are they dark?
>
> Bella: Yeah.
>
> Elizabeth: Do you have a guess?
>
> Bella: (pause) Because that's the title?

I explained that these were words that the author felt might be challenging to the reader and were listed in the glossary. Bella then asked if the glossary provided a clue to the meaning.

Later in the text, Bella struggled to understand *static electricity* and then applied one of the fix-up strategies she'd learned.

> Bella: It says, it says like, it's something like a, I can't say the word.
>
> Elizabeth: Yeah, it's hard to explain, isn't it? So if we keep going to the end of the sentence, that doesn't work because we're already at the end of the sentence, right?
>
> Bella: We can read it again.

Farther along, she made use of other strategies.

> Elizabeth: So, I'm not quite sure what spark is so I'm going to read ahead (reads on).
>
> Bella: The spark is (points to picture).

Elizabeth: Oh yeah, the rest of the sentence plus the picture tells us what spark means.

As we completed the reading, Bella referred back to her earlier statement that thunder and lightning are dangerous. It had become clear that, since thunder was something you *heard*, it was, in fact, not harmful, as Bella noted.

Bella: I got it wrong. It won't hurt you.

Elizabeth: Oh, but does it say the lightning won't hurt you or the thunder?

Bella: The thunder

Elizabeth: Right, but we don't know yet if LIGHTNING can hurt you. Let's keep reading and maybe we'll figure that out.

Bella: (read on through the part that explained lightning's potential for harm) Oh!

As Bella continued to read, she found information that confirmed some of her prior knowledge, commented that she didn't understand a sentence and intended to re-read it, and noted that she didn't know what *rumbles* meant. When asked what she had done well during the reading that day, she astutely noted that she had succeeded in determining the meaning of new words. This transcription segment shows Bella to be an intensely active reader: interrogating both the text and her prior knowledge, attending to a variety of text features, applying the strategies she'd learned to deal with breakdowns in understanding, and demonstrating an awareness of her strengths.

Gaining closure. It never crossed my mind that Bella would feel any concern about ending our work together. She had always been reserved and business-like in her interactions with me. So, I assumed that parting ways would be no big deal for her. I was wrong. In our 26th session, as we were choosing her last goal, I noted that we wouldn't have a lot of time to work on it since we only had four days left.

Bella: What!

Elizabeth: Yeah! (not yet understanding that she was upset about this)

Bella: No (in a whiny voice)

Elizabeth: This is time number 26 and we're going to have 30 times.

Bella: Noooo!

Elizabeth: Are you not feeling good about that?

Bella: (nods)

I assured her that our small group would continue until the end of the year and that the only reason I needed to stop meeting with her individually was because I had to write a really, really, really long paper about our work together. She seemed resigned to the situation at this point, but, in true Bella style, she had not given up. A few minutes later, when there was a break in the conversation, she tried again.

Bella: After you're done with, after you write your thing about . . .

Elizabeth: About everything I've done here?

Bella: Yeah, will you, can we work together again?

Elizabeth: (laughs) I won't be done with that paper for a year!

Bella: Oh . . . after the year?

There is no doubt in my mind that Bella's distress about coming to the end of our one-on-one relationship was not about any personal feelings she had for me. Our relationship had always been cool and professional; she had warm relationships with her family members and did not

look to me to supply the love she could not find there. What I provided was the opportunity for an intense academic connection that allowed her the space and time to grow as a reader.

Looking Back and Looking Forward

So, who was Bella as we concluded our working relationship? In many ways, she had changed very little. She was still the energetic, inquisitive, determined, self-aware, and somewhat aloof child whom I had first met in September. But in other ways Bella was quite different. While she continued to appear more at ease in the tutorial setting, she seemed to have crafted for herself a new group identity – that of helper. She guided new members of our group in positive ways and evidently delighted in this. She was reading somewhere between the early fourth and mid-fifth grade level, depending on the genre, and she came within a few points of scoring in the proficient range on the California Standards Test. Bella's facility with multi-syllabic words increased significantly to the point where she could come within a sound or two of decoding almost any word she ran across. The fly in the decoding ointment continued to be her academic language weaknesses; often the words she needed to figure out were not in her oral vocabulary. However, she grew more proficient at using context to figure out word meanings and this assisted her greatly. Bella grew less dependent on tactics such as reliance on text features, relying more on strategies such as predicting, visualization, self-monitoring, and fix-ups. There was context-bound evidence for this in her growing proficiency with think alouds; her dramatically higher score on the Metacomprehension Strategies Index was a decontextualized indicator. Bella also came to see herself as an achiever. She enjoyed setting new goals and reveled in completing them – particularly when her success was recognized in the presence of her peers. Of possibly greatest import, however, was Bella's new-found delight in books – particularly those featuring characters with whom she shared much in common: young, spunky girls. By the end of the school year, Bella's mother could not get her to leave her book to come for dinner. She had officially joined what Frank Smith (1988) has termed The Literacy Club.

Sam: Algorithm Is My Friend

In many classrooms there is an invisible child. In Katya's classroom, that child was Sam. When I first encountered him, he sat quietly, never raising his hand. When other children misbehaved, Sam ignored them. His posture was hunched, his face impassive. When he worked in small groups, he let his peers make all the decisions and do most of the work. Sam would, on occasion, make Ninja-like movements with his arms as if fighting some foe as invisible as he. But no one seemed to notice. No one.

Sam is a native Cantonese-speaking English learner. At the beginning of the study, his California English Language Development Test (CELDT) scores averaged in the Early Advanced range with similar scores across the four domains of listening, speaking, reading and writing. He was ranked Basic in English language arts and Proficient in math on the California Standards Test (CST).

Based on the Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) I employed to assess Sam's reading, his instructional level was somewhere between late first and late second grade, depending on the genre of the text (narrative stronger than expository) and the method of reading (oral reading stronger than silent – although not preferred). His listening comprehension was stronger than his reading comprehension. In analyzing his miscues and understanding of text, relative

challenges for Sam included all levels of comprehension (low-inference/retell, high-inference, and critical/creative) and making connections to text. Relative strengths included sight vocabulary, decoding, and fluency. A think aloud protocol demonstrated that Sam was sometimes aware that he didn't understand, but unable to name what was causing the problem. He was unclear about major points and had no sense of the moral offered by the fable. Results on the Metacomprehension Strategy Index demonstrated that Sam had great difficulty selecting useful approaches to accessing text before, during, and after reading; his score was 0/4 on questions related to monitoring/summarizing. He could offer no strategies for dealing with breakdowns in comprehension.[10]

Sam's favorite school subjects were math and science; he hoped to become a doctor. He said that he enjoyed most aspects of reading, including fluency testing with his teacher, unless it involved public display – reading aloud or answering questions in front of peers. Of sixteen different activities, he chose video games and going on the Internet as his top choices, with writing as his fifth and reading his eighth choice.

Like Bella, Sam was somewhat conflicted about what it means to be an effective reader. At first, he seemed to focus most on decoding, believing that good readers say words correctly, that reading words perfectly is the primary purpose for reading, and that good readers never run into difficulty as they read. However, he also thought that someone who makes mistakes and reads slowly but understands is a better reader than someone who reads accurately and quickly but has low comprehension. Sam said his older brother who reads chapter books and understands stories really well is the best reader he knows.

Despite mentioning his brother's effective reading, Sam's connections with others did not seem to have a very strong influence on his reading development. He reported reading for 30 minutes at home each day (as required by his teacher) but no one at home ever read with him. Sam said he talked with family (I believe this consisted largely of questioning by his father) and teachers about what he was reading, and that adults, although not peers, influenced his book selection.

Sam remembered very little about learning to read in his early years and was not strongly connected to books. While he mentioned reading decodables from school with his dad, he didn't remember anything specific about learning to read at school. He had neither a favorite book nor a favorite author, could not suggest a topic he wanted to read about, and stated that he had read no books for pleasure in the past month. When asked about the two most recent books he'd read, Sam listed two series books: *A to Z Mysteries* (Roy, 1997-2011) and *Bailey School Kids* (Daday & Jones, 1991-2006). He had a library card but did not visit the library.

When asked to speak about his reading, Sam's self-evaluation stood in contrast to the results of my initial assessments. He believed that reading stories with short words and understanding what he'd read were the easiest parts of reading, while figuring out the meaning of new words was the most difficult. Sam saw learning new words as his primary goal. He said he viewed himself as a good reader while others thought he was only an OK reader.

[10] See complete assessment results in Appendix C.

In early November, I interviewed Sam's father. He said that his son talked very little but was "always thinking." He confirmed that Sam liked the computer, writing, and sometimes math. Sam regularly attempted to avoid reading by convincing his father that he had already done so and never talked with family members about books read unless asked. His dad noticed that, while Sam read words correctly, he sometimes did not understand what he'd read. Sam's father explained that he himself read magazines and newspapers for pleasure and that he discussed what he read with his wife; his work did not require reading of any sort. He believed a good reader is someone who reads fast and understands what's been read, and who uses proper grammar in writing.

Sam's teacher Katya spoke of him as a child who generally liked reading and learning and was interested in books, particularly mysteries and scary stories. She noted that he was methodical, attended to detail, and passed Accelerated Reader quizzes. She said he would not skip over parts of books that he didn't understand. Sam followed directions most of the time, but would not ask for help if confused, even when she made a point to check in with him individually. Katya said that he did not like group work or discussions and showed very little emotion.

In my initial classroom observations of Sam, he demonstrated a passive approach to most every activity; in one instance his reading partner stood nearby holding their books for several minutes, but Sam just sat there waiting rather than ask for his book. He exhibited a number of self-distracting behaviors: fiddling with his fingers, rubbing his face, moving his lips without talking, and spinning his pencil like a light saber. He tended to self-isolate – positioning himself just off the rug, sitting silently. He responded when another student initiated contact with him during Turn and Talk time. However, a few minutes later he looked over at the child as if expecting to talk with him again, but made no effort to begin the conversation. At one point, he became the brunt of another boy's joke and, during group work, he was bossed around by the other members of his group (all girls).

So, who was Sam as we entered into our working relationship? He was a child who seemed to go through the motions of school – doing as he was told but exhibiting little initiative. Like Bella, Sam had no clear connection to books and he read only as much as his teacher told him to read. Sam frequently read *A to Z Mysteries*; this provided him with a regular source of new titles, but he never expressed any genuine enthusiasm for these books.

There were clear strengths and challenges evident in Sam's profile. He liked math and was good at it, but it seemed to be computation rather than abstract thinking that engaged him. He decoded easily and effectively and, while not fast or expressive, read smoothly and accurately. But when asked to retell or answer questions about what he had read, Sam was often at a loss. At times, he would look at me as if to say, "And why in the world would you even ask me such a thing?" Sam's efforts to avoid attention meant that he rarely spoke in class and missed opportunities to grow in confidence by practicing what he'd learned.

Sam was clearly uncertain about what it meant to be a successful reader. He vacillated between recognizing that meaning-making was most important and then falling back into a more mechanistic view that emphasized his strengths, primarily decoding. As was true for Bella, the most visible measures of reading ability in his classroom were quarterly fluency assessments and near-daily practice sessions. Given his tendency to excel in this area, it was no

doubt difficult to embrace a view of literacy that was based on something that was far more difficult for him.

Initially, Sam seemed to have no real sense that he was not a strong reader – or would not admit it if he did. He also seemed to be promoting an image of himself as Reader by insisting that he liked to read despite clear evidence to the contrary – an image that his teacher seemed to buy into even though neither I nor his father did.

Not unexpectedly, Sam was also unaware of what elements of reading were problematic for him; yet he was sensitive to approaches that might help others who struggled. When asked how his teacher helped students in his class who were having trouble with reading, Sam said he didn't know. However, when asked what he would do if he were the teacher, he explained that he would help students figure out words – NOT tell them – and help them to understand what was happening in the text they were reading. This seemed remarkably perceptive to me, given his lack of clarity about his own difficulties.

Through all of this, Sam kept me at a distance, as he did his teacher and other students. He would not speak to me unless asked a direct question and hurried back to his classroom as quickly as he could after we'd wrapped up a session together. Sam's teacher suggested that he had strong connections with family members and this might be why he felt little need to establish warm relationships with peers and school-based adults.

Sam's Tactics.

What tactics did Sam employ in his approach to text? As noted earlier, I am not attributing to these methods a negative connotation. Many of the tactics Sam (and the other children) employed were effective as far as they went, but were ultimately not enough to produce strong readers. They left gaps in Sam's understanding and, ultimately, his connection to text.

I'll offer a brief overview of these tactics here and explain them in more detail as they appear in the tutorial and small group sessions described in the following sections. Sam was more strategic than tactical in his approach to text: sounding out was what he did. This approach was, of course, applicable in many situations; the problem was that this strategy actually seemed to undermine meaning-making since Sam could decode words he didn't understand and took this to be his primary purpose in reading. Had he experienced more difficulty with decoding, he might have been forced to wrestle with meaning and print in tandem and would have actually understood more of what he read.

Sam was, however, quite the tactician when it came to keeping himself disconnected from classroom life. Time and time again, he made choices that separated one part of his life from another and that seemed to protect him from failure – both in academics and in personal relationships. He kept himself isolated from his classmates whenever possible and talked rarely. During one-on-one time, when it was nearly impossible to avoid interacting with me, he would typically nod/shake his head or reply with single word answers even when a longer response was clearly required to address the topic at hand. When he did speak, he frequently employed grammatical structures that I had just used, and generally ended his remarks with rising intonation, giving the clear impression that he felt quite tentative about his response and worried that he might be wrong. These tactics allowed him to remain disconnected from content and people.

Getting to Know Sam

What did I come to understand about Sam over the course of our time together? In some ways I believe I learned a lot and yet, in the end, he was in many ways just as mysterious as ever. As was true of Bella, some elements of Sam's personality and academic functioning remained stable throughout the course of our time together. In other ways he changed quite significantly. I'll begin by looking at his affective and social dispositions, then examine his cognitive characteristics, and finally look at bridges between the two realms.

The affective/social realm. There were both affective and social factors that appeared to stand in the way of Sam's success as a reader and as a friend. In contrast to Bella, he was not a risk-taker. He was either unwilling or unable to make connections between his personal experience and the books he read and other academic activities. He seemed to have a number of negative feelings that went largely unexpressed. And he was clearly uncomfortable with his peers. Happily, there were some improvements in these areas over time.

Declining challenges. More commonly than one might expect, even children who struggle in school are willing to take risks in an effort to learn and grow. Sam did not seem to be one of these children; he employed the tactic of avoidance instead. If left completely to his own devices, Sam would have selected as his first goal learning to pronounce new words despite the fact that this was his most significant strength. There were at least six occasions where Sam could have chosen to accept a challenge and five times he declined. While still getting comfortable with the Wheel of Fortune game, he correctly guessed a word for the puzzle. He was allowed to make a second guess – either another word or a letter. When asked, he said, "Pass." No other child had ever done this and none would ever again do so. I nudged him to at least guess a letter which he eventually did, but his first instinct was to not participate at all rather than risk being wrong.

All of the other situations were connected to goal-setting. At one point it became clear that, due to disruptions in our tutoring schedule, he would not be able to achieve his goal of offering 20 opinions by the target date we'd set. This left us with two options – setting a new target date or lowering the expectations for opinions. He chose the latter, cutting the goal in half to ten. Having generated only ten opinions, I was less than confident that he had truly grasped the process of offering reasons for what he thought, as well as the opinions themselves and I again suggested that it might be best to continue work on this goal. But he declined, choosing to set another (from my perspective, less challenging) goal. When it came to crafting his goal for figuring out the meanings of new words, I suggested that 20-25 would be a reasonable target; he chose fifteen. Finally, after he'd worked on speaking loudly and clearly in group discussions and had most certainly achieved that goal, he chose to keep the same goal rather than apply himself to a new one. The one time Sam accepted a challenge of sorts was when I asked him if he preferred to read a text on his own or trade off pages with me. He chose the former, reading aloud being an activity he felt confident about.

Another way of avoiding challenges was to say as little as possible. Sam spoke, on average, less than 200 words per 40 minute tutorial session and far less in small group. When he did respond, he often answered with single words, nodded or shook his head, or, early on (until he came to understand that I would wait for him to give me a "real" answer), "I don't

know." As we planned for his goal of making connections in mid-November, the following exchange occurred:

Elizabeth: I think in your classroom you call connections links. Am I right about that?

Sam: (nods)

Elizabeth: How many links do you want to have as your goal?

Sam: Uh (extremely long pause), uh, I don't know . . .

Elizabeth: Can you ever remember making a connection between something you were reading and your own life?

Sam: Yes.

Even when he offered a more extended response, about half the time Sam spoke as if he were asking a question. In a sense, if he responded in this way, he could never be wrong since he didn't lay claim to the information he was providing by expressing it with confidence. One day we were reading about plants that ate animals. Sam had some background knowledge about this topic because one of his friends had shown him his Venus Fly Trap. However, when we got to the part about the pitcher plant, Sam's responses – although quite accurate, were very tentative:

Elizabeth: Why is the pitcher plant so slippery?

Sam: Uh, because of the sticky liquid?

Elizabeth: Uh, huh, but what is the purpose? Why does it help the plant to have slippery sides?

Sam: Because when the bug gets dipped by the liquid it can't climb up because it's slippery?

He was equally tentative when asked for his opinion, a reason for his opinion, or other open-ended questions; here are a couple of examples:

Elizabeth: Do you think she made a good decision or a bad decision?

Sam: A bad decision?

Elizabeth: Why do you think that?

Sam: Because she didn't tell him that she'll die?

Elizabeth: What are some of the things you know about dinosaurs?

Sam: Dinosaurs are extinct?

Elizabeth: Is there anything you've read so far that relates to the list we made about dinosaurs?

Sam: They found some dinosaur bones?

Sam was not one to put himself on the line. He tended to set easily-achievable goals or abandon more challenging ones. He spoke very little and the responses he did make were typically one or two words, if not just nods or shakes of the head. Longer responses – more typical later in our work together than at the beginning – were usually offered with a questioning intonation. I suspect that Sam was concerned that making more risky decisions would expose him to the kind of attention he preferred to (tactically) avoid.

No connections here. When we note connections between our own experiences and those of characters in a story, we are better able to make sense of the plot and to understand the motivation behind the characters' actions. Despite the fact, that Sam adopted making text-to-self connections as a goal quite early on, this continued to be a struggle for him. More than

half the time he was unable to do so and this did not improve over time. He seemed to feel no connection to a number of story events that are relatively common experiences like waking up from a dream and not knowing whether it actually happened or not, or wanting to do something that an adult didn't think you should do. However, the connections he did make resulted in some of the most poignant moments in our work together. When a character was waiting for someone else, Sam told me that when he was home alone he would often just sit and wait until a family member came home. And when a character in one of Schwartz's (1981) *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* was left alone at the end of the story, Sam said, "I feel a link to my own life because I'm the only Asian friend." I left these encounters feeling that Sam was dealing with some profound emotions. This was exhibited in other ways as well.

Feelings unexpressed . . . and expressed. For some reason that I could never fully comprehend, Sam chose to keep his feelings under wraps most of the time. He had had the same teacher for second and third grade and she told Katya that Sam had never expressed any form of emotion in the two years she spent with him. In the fall of fourth grade, Sam was selected to represent his classroom in the grade-level spelling bee. I decided to attend in order to acknowledge this honor. He stood at the front of the room and, when given his first word, spelled it incorrectly. Others who misspelled words displayed their displeasure in a range of ways from nervous laughter to muttering unmentionables under their breath. Sam said nothing and, despite the fact that this must have been a disappointment for him, his face remained impassive as he simply turned on his heel and returned to his seat.

There were indications across the time we worked together that Sam did, in fact, experience strong feelings, many of them negative. The sense of being different noted above was reinforced when he talked about the loneliness he felt when he entered a new school. At one point, I asked him to name some feelings for me. Three of the four he listed – sad, angry, and worried – were unpleasant.

However, as time went on, Sam began to open up with Katya. On several occasions when he was unfairly treated on the playground he began to cry in class; as unhappy as Katya and I felt about the pain he was going through, on some level we believed this might be a positive sign – that he was finally allowing himself to express some of the emotions he'd hidden for so long. Then, the unthinkable happened. Every morning Katya stood at her classroom door asking each child if (s)he wanted a hug or a handshake and every morning Sam chose the handshake. But one day in early spring, not saying a word, he reached out and hugged Katya. He continued this practice for the remainder of the school year and his fifth grade teacher tells me that his hugs are among the most solid in her class. I suspect that Sam came to view Katya as an ally and that this feeling transferred to teachers in general.

No comfort here. Sam never seemed fully at ease in either the tutorial or small group setting. In tutorial, he talked about his life outside of school only when directly prompted. While Bella regularly mentioned family members and occasionally her teacher or peers, Sam spoke of another person only once in all our time together, and then only when asked. He had taken home his first goal certificate and I asked him what his family had said, "They said congratulations," he replied – the exact wording that was on the certificate.

If Sam was a somewhat reluctant participant in our tutorial sessions, he was far less comfortable in the small group. He spoke an average of 20 words each session. Every time the

students were asked to work independently, Sam would employ the tactic of self-isolation, selecting a seat at a table by himself unless I insisted otherwise. He made the same odd movements I'd observed in his classroom. And on the last day of Book Circle, when we were exchanging compliments, he sat by himself and read from the book I'd given him the entire time, even when I reminded him that it was important for him to participate and even after he'd been acknowledged by another student for his expertise at Wheel of Fortune. Sam seemed a bit more comfortable as time went on (discussed in upcoming pages), but he was never "in the thick" of our little community.

Summary. I suspect that the progress Sam made in coming to terms with his emotions had a greater impact on his academic achievement than might be first evident. As will be discussed later, he began to admit to the fact that he did not always understand what he read. It seems likely that, once he could acknowledge uncomfortable feelings, that may have allowed him to confront the fact that he was not as good a reader as he had once thought. This led to risk-taking of a sort as he learned what to do about his lack of understanding.

I want to emphasize that there were no major transformations in Sam's persona, however. He never became the active learner that Bella was; he had to be nudged every step of the way. Nevertheless, Sam made a great deal of academic progress and I believe achieving some limited amount of growth in the affective/social realm facilitated that growth. I wanted very much to believe that there was no need to re-make children's natural personalities in order to help them with reading and, in Sam's case as in Bella's, that turned out to be true.

The academic realm. Sam, like Bella, viewed himself as a student, but his definition of what it meant to be a student differed greatly from hers. He believed it was his job to work on the tasks he was given, but not to shape that work in any way. However, Sam responded to clear and careful instruction, particularly with regard to his greatest challenge, the construction of meaning. By and large, he learned what I taught him and was eventually able to transfer some of that instruction from the tutorial to the class setting and, to a limited degree, internalize it.

Problems with construction of meaning. The proficient reader recognizes that meaning is not embodied within text; rather it must be manufactured by combining input from the print on the page with prior knowledge of the way the reading process works and of the text content (Kintsch, 2004). This was simply not Sam's approach to the world. His expectation was that he needed to "find" meaning rather than construct it. Correlated with this belief was the idea that if he could *not* find the meaning, he had no real recourse but to give up.

Sam's initial assessments and early tutorial sessions were noteworthy by the sheer quantity of "I don't know" answers. After reading an excerpt from "The Steadfast Tin Soldier," Sam told me that the soldiers had uniforms and one of them had only one leg. When I asked follow-up questions – ranging from low- to high-inference in nature – he responded "I don't know" to all of the following:

- What were the soldiers made of? And then – Were they real people?
- How did the boy happen to get the soldiers?
- Why did the soldier have only one leg?
- How did the boy feel about getting the soldiers? How do you know?

In other passages, he offered the same response when asked to determine word meanings.

Of the five passages for which Sam's comprehension was inadequate, his accuracy was at the independent level on all of them. As noted above, he struggled with understanding at all levels: vocabulary, low-inference, retelling/summarizing, high-inference, and critical. There were times, of course, when Sam attempted to answer my questions. But above the mid-second grade level (first grade with expository text or when asked to read silently), his responses were woefully inadequate. At times he would look at me as if to say, "You heard me read the passage; why on earth are you asking me to tell about it?"

While Sam's teacher did not seem to fully understand the extent of his difficulties, his father was more cognizant of the problem. He viewed Sam as a child who thought intently, particularly about finagling his way out of activities – like reading – that he didn't enjoy. But Sam also did not seem to understand that reading demanded that intense level of thought. As his dad noted, "He reads the words but he doesn't understand."

Just give me an algorithm. I'll never forget a conversation I had with Katya after working with Sam for a couple of months. We were talking about Sam's facility with and interest in math and Katya told me that she believed its appeal for Sam lay in the fact that he could follow steps in a process and arrive at the expected result. "If reading could be more like math for him . . ." My experience with Sam was a match with Katya's comment. For each comprehension strategy I taught him, I presented a series of steps. For example, for predicting those steps were:

1. **Think** about what might happen next.
2. Make a **prediction.**
3. Give a **reason** for your prediction.
4. Read to **prove or disprove** your prediction.
5. **Hold on** to the prediction if it was correct; **let go** if it wasn't.

After we'd worked on the strategy for some time, I simply pointed to each step in turn and he completed them. I gave him bookmarks with the bolded words on them – one to keep at school and one to take home. He reported using these bookmarks at home to help him remember the steps. They served as a way to make the challenging process of understanding text more like something at which he was already successful.

Learning from what he's been taught. There's an old saw (typically accurate, I believe) that children learn what they are taught. The problem is that they learn as much from adults' attitudes, off-hand remarks, body language, and behavior as they do from what those adults intentionally teach. This may have been as true for Sam as it is for other children. He learned from Katya, for example, that it was possible to express emotion and accept affection and live to tell about it. But he also learned the explicit objectives I had to teach him from the carefully crafted lessons I prepared. Sam came to note the overlap between his prior knowledge, the questions he wondered about, and the information presented in the text. He learned to effectively employ decoding and comprehension strategies such as predicting, self-monitoring, and use of context. His ability to articulate his thinking was supported by academic sentence frames. And he regularly evaluated his own progress, often referring to his strengths, his challenges, and the lessons I'd recently taught.

Predicting. Making predictions was the first goal Sam selected and, initially, it did not come easily for Sam. This was evident in the first session we spent working on this strategy. I

explained to Sam that a prediction was an idea about what might happen in a story for which one could provide a reason, and gave him several examples. When I asked Sam what he thought would happen in the story we were about to read, he said, "That lady is sitting in the graveyard;" this was actually a fact that could be seen in the picture on the title page. His second attempt was yet another statement about something that could be seen in a picture. Finally, he said, "The dead people come to life, I think," but when asked to provide a reason for his prediction, he offered another prediction instead – "Because they're playing, two people playing dead people in the graveyard." When, after reading, Sam was asked to prove or disprove his prediction, his evidence relied again on a picture – "he's opening his eyes" – rather than from the text (the corpses were talking). However, by the end of our work on this strategy, Sam was making reasoned predictions and providing supporting evidence. For example, having read the story title "The Night It Rained," and looking at the cover picture, Sam predicted that the story was about "a boy in the street and it's raining." When I asked why he believed this, Sam replied "because there's a boy in the picture and the title has night rain. After reading, he knew that his prediction had been correct and that he should "hold on" to it going forward.

Listing background knowledge and asking questions. To initiate our work with expository text, I focused on asking Sam to generate a list of prior knowledge about the topic at hand. It was common for him to have at least four or five facts to offer. For example, before reading a book on dinosaurs, Sam explained that dinosaurs were big, that some ate meat, and that they were now extinct. He knew that dinosaur bones had been found in the ground and that they could be viewed in museums. While he never did so spontaneously, when prompted, Sam was also able to recognize these facts when they turned up in the texts he read, even when they were paraphrased or even vaguely alluded to. He also noticed when the things he knew were omitted from the text we were reading and recognized that this did not mean that his prior knowledge was erroneous, only that the author did not happen to include it.

Sam was less enthusiastic about offering questions that he thought might be answered in a text. He told me a few things he knew about sound but when asked what questions he had about the topic, replied that he had none. When I told him that I thought the book might teach us how we measure the volume of various sounds, he suggested that we might also learn "how sounds get created." Not surprisingly, Sam had no prior knowledge about Helen Keller, but when I provided two facts – that she was famous and that she faced some challenges – he asked why she was famous and what problems she had. As noted above, Sam also initially had trouble making predictions when reading narrative text and, in retrospect, generating questions that he thought might be answered in an expository text was a parallel operation – predicting what content would be covered.

Self-monitoring and use of fix-ups. Sam and I began our work on self-monitoring by reading a series of problematic sentences to see if he could recognize what was difficult to understand within each one. In this relatively straightforward situation (he knew something didn't make sense and only had to determine what it was), Sam did quite well. But once I added another layer of complexity – he had to decide whether a sentence was confusing or not and, if it was, figure out what was causing the problem – Sam struggled. This was true whether it was a vocabulary problem (e.g., "The fluts boy was tired and grumpy") or an idea problem

(e.g., “When the party was over, the guests yelled at their hosts,” or “The city opened a shelter to hurt homeless people”). If the sentence was clear (e.g., “The team will be eliminated from play-off contention if they lose”) Sam knew this, even when it included some relatively sophisticated vocabulary. But he was not sensitive to confusion and once we transitioned to “real” texts in which the elements of difficulty were less obvious, Sam’s struggles increased. It took quite a long time to see improvement. But after about five tutorial sessions, he began to remark on word-based issues such as *remote*, *loch*, and terms referring to parts of a spaceship. Later, he occasionally noticed idea-based confusion as well.

Once Sam was more effective at noting confusion, I taught him strategies for dealing with that confusion such as reading ahead, re-reading, skipping the offending part, or getting help (person or dictionary). There was some evidence that he had experience applying these strategies prior to instruction since, in an early session, he asked me to re-read something that he didn’t understand. Soon after instruction began, Sam could use these strategies quite effectively when prompted and there even was a brief period when he seemed to do so spontaneously. I responded to this by naming what I thought was going on. For example, if there was a challenging word followed by an appositional definition of the word, I explained that what I *thought* he did was to register his confusion and read ahead to find out what the word meant. After a session or two, however, there was less evidence of unprompted use of “fix-ups.”

Context clues. From the get-go, Sam was quite effective at using context clues to decode words. On the initial maze test, he scored at grade level or higher. Over time, he demonstrated his ability to use context to determine word meanings as well. When prompted, he could point out which words served as clues. There were times when he even seemed to go beyond other-words-in-the-sentence hints to take clues from the bigger context. During a Wheel of Fortune game, he guessed the word *today* at the beginning of the sentence. It was common for the puzzle sentence to begin with this word because it often served as an introduction to what we were going to do on that particular day and Sam used that understanding of the content of the sentences I’d used over time to support him. Similarly, while reading a book on the Venus fly trap and other similar plants, he initially read a phrase as “some animals eat . . .” and then self-corrected to “some plants eat animals,” utilizing his awareness of the book as a whole to guide his reading. Sam was able to figure out the meanings of concepts that were quite sophisticated and even metaphorical. While reading a book on volcanoes, he easily explained that an active volcano is currently erupting, an extinct volcano had “died,” and a dormant volcano is one that “is not erupting but it could erupt sometimes.” A book he was reading about the solar system referred to the planets as “the sun’s family;” Sam said this term was used “because they’re around the sun.”

Academic sentence frames. One of the most powerful instructional tools I learned from the fourth grade teachers at my research site was the use of academic language frames. My previous experience with sentence frames had not been positive. They were used to support emergent writers (e.g., *I like* ____.) and the resulting compositions were stilted and wholly uninteresting. But Libby, Katya, and Ellen used academic frames (e.g., *Since ____occurred, I can infer ____)* to great success. Rather than constraining children’s thinking as the emergent

writer frames had done, these language structures seemed to relieve students of the burden of articulating what they had to say, thus freeing them to focus on the content of their ideas.

Sam liked using frames to support our strategy work. He told me that the frames helped him to say what he meant. This was particularly true for an area with which he regularly struggled – making connections between the text he was reading and his own personal experience. The frame I taught Sam was *When ____happened, I felt a link to my own life because* ____. While he never fully internalized this frame, he used it adroitly with minimal encouragement.

All layers of understanding. Sam's initial assessment indicated that he struggled with understanding at each level from word meaning to critical/creative thinking. We tackled these various aspects of comprehension and he improved on all fronts. In some cases, the change was so swift that I wondered if I had underestimated his abilities. However, Katya told me that, so long as concepts and processes were presented methodically with regular reminders to apply what he'd learned, Sam picked things up very quickly in the classroom context. It seems likely that he was a "quick study" in our work together, as well.

Sam grew more facile in figuring out the meanings of words in context as time went on. Prior to instruction the number of challenging words he could define was in approximately a 1: 1 ratio with those he could not; during the time we focused on this, this ratio increased to 2:1 and to 4:1 after instruction was complete. Early in the fall, Sam struggled with all sorts of words from relatively simple, concrete terms like *twigs* to more complex words like *colony.* He also had difficulty with common words used in less-common ways (e.g., *bright* used to mean intelligent) and idioms (e.g., being "hard" on people). As time went on, he was more willing to admit these difficulties. By the end of the instructional sequence, Sam was figuring out advanced words such as *continent, astronomer*, and *spacecraft*; alternate meanings for *rocket* (used as a verb) and *story* (floor of a building); and relatively archaic forms such as "seek his fortune." There were still many occasions when Sam was stumped by technical vocabulary – he was even known to use words that he did not understand in his own writing – but these occurred less often than at first.

Sam's low-inference comprehension also improved. When asked specific questions about what he had read, his accuracy ratio was about 5: 1 prior to instruction, 8: 1 during, and 10:1 after. The source of his difficulty varied. Sometimes it involved details that were either relatively unimportant (e.g., he didn't understand a reference to the number of ants that could fit within a space the size of the hole in the letter a) or more significant (e.g., whether or not two characters saw a third character). Some challenges were more conceptual (e.g., how sounds are created, or whether a character was a living person or a ghost). And sometimes Sam admitted to a lack of clarity about a book as a whole. These problems were by no means absent by the end of our instructional sequence, especially when new information came in conflict with his prior knowledge. Sam believed, for example, that stars were tiny and that the sun was fundamentally different than other stars; despite reading a text that contradicted these common-wisdom ideas, Sam did not abandon his original beliefs without considerable coaxing. However, in general, his low-inference comprehension was much improved. He understood what stars were made of, why no creatures could live on a star, how planets

differed from other heavenly bodies, and what types of activities astronauts engaged in while in space.

Determining what information was most important was also a challenge for Sam. This was particularly true with regard to expository text. I introduced Sam to the idea of recognizing the topic of a passage by asking him to differentiate between general and specific terms (e.g., fruit vs. mangoes). He could do this easily. However, when he read a segment of a text that emphasized how well-known Tyrannosaurus Rex was relative to other dinosaurs, he told me it was about the dinosaur's eating habits. When I went back over the passage sentence by sentence, though, he was able to note the actual topic and had very little trouble with this activity after that point. Determining the main idea – what the text had to say about the topic – was more of a challenge. While he knew that another segment of the Tyrannosaurus text dealt with the creature's arms, he stated that the arms were useful in attacking other dinosaurs when, in fact, the passage presented just the opposite information; on the page that talked about T Rex's head, Sam focused on details about its teeth and sense of smell rather than on the general idea that various aspects of the head were helpful in catching prey. By the last tutorial session in which we worked on this skill, however, Sam could easily explain both the topic and main idea – that tornadoes commonly formed in Tornado Alley, that we could measure the strength of tornadoes, and that families sometimes built shelters to protect themselves from them. In the first half of instruction Sam's ratio of correct to incorrect topics/main ideas was 3: 1, by the latter half it had increased to 16:1.

During the initial battery of assessments Sam had also struggled to retell what had happened in a short story. However, by the time he selected this as his final goal, he had improved markedly. On the first tutorial session we spent focusing on retelling, he produced a more than adequate recap of a short story from *Sideways Stories from the Wayside School* (Sachar, 1985) that I had read aloud to him, and chuckled a bit as he told it. By the next story, he was including direct quotes from the text: the students thought the new teacher would be "terribly nice," and the teacher thought the students would be "terribly cute." On our last day together, I was called away to speak with a parent while Sam read another story aloud to himself. Even though I had not previously read the story, I could easily follow his retelling and he was responsive when I asked follow-up questions. He also did well after a story he read silently.

Sam's improvement in high-inference and critical comprehension developed in similar ways. He set relatively unchallenging goals in both areas (or, in the case of offering opinions, reduced his goal rather than extend the time needed to work on it). He clearly felt even less comfortable in these areas than he did with lower-inference understanding. Early on in our work on he tended to provide facts or to offer characters' opinions rather than his own; he also had trouble explaining his reasoning. Soon I began to ask more specific questions (e.g., "Why do you suppose people never stayed more than one night [in the barn]?" rather than "Can you figure anything out from that part?") and this helped Sam a great deal. While he struggled throughout instruction, he had improved a great deal by the end with a 6: 1 ratio of acceptable to unacceptable inferences and a 9: 0 ratio for logical opinions post-instruction.

Self-evaluation. Over the course of our work together, I frequently asked Sam to tell me what he felt he had done well during out tutorial sessions. He responded readily to this

question and his answers seemed to fall into one of three categories. Early on, he frequently told me that he had understood what he'd read, not surprising given that he knew this was our overarching focus. Later, for reasons that are not completely clear to me, he often said that he had pronounced words correctly, something that he was very good at but that had never been the focus of our work. It is the case that the texts he'd read on those days had a number of words that were not easily pronounced, but other texts had provided the same level of challenge. The third group of responses reflected the specific lesson focus for that particular day – predicting, figuring out word meanings, and remembering/retelling the plot of a story. This last category of response was quite evenly distributed across our sessions.

Transferring and internalizing knowledge. Clearly, Sam learned a great deal over the course of our work together – some, apparently, from explicit instruction and some, it seemed, via osmosis. A certain amount of what he learned seemed too contextualized; this knowledge seemed neither to transfer to another locale, specifically our small group time, nor become internalized to such a degree that he applied it spontaneously as needed while reading. Sam could note the overlap between background information and questions he brought to a text and the content of the text itself, but he did not demonstrate this capability in the small group and never mentioned it in tutorial without being asked. Likewise, the academic sentence frames I modeled seemed to help him – and, in fact, he said as much – but he only used them when initiated by me and never in small group. And while by the end of the instructional period, he'd become quite adept at determining the most crucial information in a passage, he never demonstrated this skill in other contexts.

It seemed there were other bits of knowledge that Sam either internalized or transferred but not both. After working for ten somewhat frustrating sessions on self-monitoring, I finally instituted a system where he received a point for each time he clearly understood something AND a point for noting he did not understand and telling me why. After that, Sam seemed to finally grasp that I really was serious about this self-monitoring business and did much better. Then on our second to last session together, he began stopping mid-sentence to tell me he was confused – about the terms *enthusiast, modern, and Operation Deep Scan.* This was a real breakthrough for him, yet he never admitted to lack of understanding in the small group.

On the flip side, Sam learned to predict and retell and transferred these abilities to the small group, yet never seemed to engage in these practices without prompting. He made predictions when I pressed him to do so and, eventually, by raising his hand to volunteer. Sam was able to link his predictions to his own experience and to predictions made by other children and even to offer reasons for the predictions of others when they were unable to do so. Similarly, having practiced retelling in tutorial, he participated actively in the "tag team" retellings we used to recap the short stories we read in Book Circle. In the last few small group sessions each child was reading a book of her/his own choosing, focusing on what they'd learned about character traits. Sam's "character retelling" ("The character is Mark Miller. He is a new student and Mark Miller is his fake name because his real name is kind of goofy . . . Benjamin Nushmutt") was greeted with peals of laughter. There was no clear evidence, however, that Sam internalized these strategies and employed them independently. One caveat to all this was Sam's "elephant in the room." Because he was so reticent to speak – with me

and most certainly with a group of children – it meant that I could not measure with any accuracy what Sam internalized or was able to transfer. I am reminded of his father's remark that Sam was "always thinking." It's very possible that what Sam was thinking *about* changed quite significantly and in the direction of Strategy.

Some of what Sam learned was most definitely both internalized and transferred. The ratio of spontaneous to prompted use of context increased over time. In terms of transfer, Sam's great success at Wheel of Fortune was due as much to his effective use of context as it was to his facility with letter-sound patterns. By April he was also using this strategy to ferret out word meanings (e.g., *congenial*) and figurative language (e.g., "when he laughs, the sun laughs in the windowpanes"). Similarly, the ratio of his effective to ineffective low-inference comprehension increased significantly (from 5:1 pre- to 10:1 post-instruction) and he demonstrated this basic understanding of text in small group as well. Of greatest interest in this regard, however, was Sam's high-inference and critical/creative comprehension. In both these areas, Sam seemed to struggle more during the actual instructional sessions than he did before or after. I suspect this was because I was pushing him to think at a high level in situations where he might not have been naturally inclined to do so. By the time we began to discuss common texts in Book Circle, Sam was showing just how proficient he was. During our discussion of *More Than Anything Else*, Sam suggested that the literate man who taught Booker to read may have felt an obligation to do so because he was the only one capable of this task, and that this man read aloud to the crowd because they did not have newspapers of their own. Beginning in February, Sam began to demonstrate an awareness of character feelings for which I was wholly unprepared. He noted that the main character's brother in *The Wednesday Surprise* (Bunting) may have felt left out of the family circle because he was now the only one who did not read well and that, similarly, Trisha in *Thank You, Mr. Falker* – the child who struggled with reading – may have felt "dumb" about her disability. Sam also showed a great sensitivity to character motivation. Trisha would not tell her teacher about her difficulties with reading because word might get back to the other children who would tease her and Leo in "Slower Than the Rest," appreciated the pet he found on the highway not because it was a turtle, per se, but because it was a creature that he was responsible for saving.

In addition to a marked improvement in understanding at all levels, there was additional evidence that Sam was placing a greater emphasis on meaning-making. After each book we read in our guided reading time, I asked Sam whether he thought the text was easy, just right, or difficult. For the first few weeks, Sam equated difficulty with length – if it was short it was easy and if it was longer it was harder. By November, there was a change in his criterion – easy books had words that he could readily pronounce. In December there was another shift which held for the remainder of the year; if he could understand the book, it was easy.

Sam's think alouds also improved over time. In September he was fully confident in his understanding, but, in fact, misread a good bit of the plot. By March, Sam employed – and was aware of employing – strategies like "putting events in my head" and visualization. He noticed that the title seemed disconnected from the story and knew to focus on the latter rather than the former. Sam even chuckled as he realized that his final prediction was, in fact, correct.

Sam's Metacomprehension Strategies Index score was stronger in June than in September. While there was no improvement in setting purposes for reading or self-

questioning (elements we had either not focused on or which Sam had clearly not retained), he did much better on predicting, using prior knowledge, and self-monitoring/summarizing. This was the most decontextualized of all the measures I used, implying that these strategies had been fully internalized.

There was another change, this time with respect to the "paper clip" question. In our first interview, I gave the children ten paper clips and asked them to make two piles to show me how large a role they believed the print on the page and the ideas in their head played in their reading. In the fall, Sam put seven clips in the print pile and three in the head pile; by March it was the reverse.[11] I understand this to mean that he had begun to acknowledge that reading demanded an active reader who thought about the text as much or more as (s)he perceived it.

Summary.

The construction of meaning had been Sam's primary obstacle and, in truth, that continued to be the case even at the end of our time together. It seems likely that Sam's decoding and fluency will always be stronger than his understanding. Nevertheless, he learned a great deal from our work together; he attended carefully to the lessons I provided for him, employed the step-by-step, algorithmic processes I recommended, and improved in all areas. He also internalized and/or transferred much of that knowledge – the ability to use context to decode and understand word meanings; to self-monitor, predict, and retell; and to think critically and creatively in ways that I would never have expected when I first met him.

Connecting the affective/social and academic realms: Content, feelings, and friends.

From day one Sam's predominant tactics were to disconnect from his own emotions, the curriculum of his classroom, and his peers. In some ways, I feel like I know Sam only minimally more than I did in September – he is what might be termed "inscrutable" – but there is evidence that there were changes in Sam's approach to the world over the school year in which I spent time with him, largely due, I think, to the safe environment his teacher established.

Content. On some level, Sam was strongly connected to the content of our work together from the very beginning. He had considerable background knowledge to share about the topics covered in the expository texts we read. He told me that spiders make their own webs and use them to catch flies, that they can climb, and are poisonous. He knew that germs are tiny creatures that can be seen only with a microscope, that they make people sick, and that it's important to wash one's hands to avoid contamination. When asked to evaluate the books we read together, Sam gave an average rating of eight out of ten and, when I reviewed with him all the activities we'd done in tutorial and small group, he claimed to have enjoyed all of them. He also responded favorably to the opportunity to make decisions about what books we would read and what goals we would set. Sam demonstrated his commitment to learning by taking on each and every assigned task and working at it diligently until completion or until (and sometimes after) time for the activity was gone. He worked very hard to take notes for, write, and illustrate his book on wolves. He prepared to retell a book we'd read by carefully flipping through the pages to remind himself what had happened. And he wrote thoughtful discussion questions with potential answers.

[11] In June the ratio was four print to six head.

In other ways, Sam's connection to content strengthened over time. His automatic "I don't know's" were much less frequent and our conversations more expansive. In the first ten of our tutorial sessions he responded with a nod/shake of the head or a one-word reply a total of 154 times; by the last ten this dropped dramatically to 74. He was also more engaged during self-select reading time. When allowed to control the amount of time he read in tutorial, he averaged three minutes during the first ten sessions and eight minutes in the last ten. Beginning in late January, when allowed unconstrained choice of books during small group time, he would read for extended periods of up to 25 minutes. On the last day of Book Circle I could not get him to stop reading the book I'd given him in order to participate in other activities despite repeated requests!

Feelings. I noted and coded for each expression of emotion I witnessed over the course of the year. This was quite an endeavor for students like Bella and Ethan who were more transparent. For Sam, of course, this was no big deal; the process did not generate a lot of data. Nevertheless, what was noticeable was that the ratio of negative emotions (or reflection about those experienced in the past – sadness and loneliness) to positive emotions such as interest, enjoyment, and humor decreased significantly over time.

Of particular interest was the increase in the number of instances in which Sam's rather quirky sense of humor emerged. This first occurred during our fourth tutorial. Sam had predicted that the main character in one of the stories from *In a Dark, Dark Room* (Schwartz, 1985) would look for and find a pirate hiding in her closet. When the character looked there only to find the space empty, Sam chuckled. One day in late January, Sam began laughing at the beginning of Study Circle for no apparent reason. We were all curious and Timmy remarked, "I don't know what he's laughing at." Sam was laughing too hard to explain himself and we never did find out what prompted the rather out-of-character outburst. Most of Sam's remaining expressions of humor were related to stories he read. He was really taken with the *Wayside School* series (Sachar, 1985-1992) that he began reading near the end of our tutorial sessions. In one story the teacher, Mrs. Gorf, responds to her students' minor offenses by turning them, one by one, into apples. They manage to convince her to turn them back into children and, just as Mrs. Gorf is about to apple-ize them yet again, one child tosses a mirror in front of her. Mrs. Gorf accidentally turns herself into an apple and is promptly eaten by the yard duty manager who happens to stop by. Sam found this to be quite amusing. In another story, one of the children falls asleep in class and rolls out the classroom window which is 30 stories above the ground. This time Sam could not contain his laughter; I had to read the remainder of the story while he composed himself. Seeing Sam's sense of humor shine through seemed to humanize him – for me and, I suspect, for the other students.

Friends. As with his connections to content, Sam's desire for social interaction was there – if in embryonic form – from the beginning. He was usually less than enthusiastic about coming to work with me and always rushed back to class. When I asked Sam why he never said good-bye to me as the other students did, he said that he was in a hurry to return to his classroom. But Sam also set himself apart from others in many ways. He always sat alone during small group work time and he made the odd ninja-type movements noted earlier, seemingly oblivious to those around him. Not to mention the fact that he rarely spoke.

Around the middle of December, however, things began to change. For the first time he selected a seat in the middle of the group rather than on the end as he had previously done. I suspect that falling into the laughing fit mentioned above near the end of January may have positioned Sam as a less distant figure as well – suddenly he was the child who laughed uncontrollably as well as the silent one. He also allowed himself to smile more often – when he mis-guessed a word in Wheel of Fortune and knew almost immediately what the correct answer was, and when a book character who had suffered merciless teasing throughout the story was triumphant in the end. All throughout the year, Sam had requested that I give him his goal certificates during our tutorial sessions. For his last goal, however, he asked to receive it in front of his little Book Circle family. I don't want to make more of this than there is, and yet . . .

Summary. If we are to argue, as I would, that learning is about strengthening connections and about developing internal resources, then a child who feels disconnected from the world around her/him is unlikely to learn very much. Sam's natural tendency was to keep himself separate from curriculum, from his peers, and from his own feelings. Reading was difficult, his peers had been a source of pain in his life, and if the conversations we had about past experiences were any indication, reflecting on his feelings was not a source of joy. But over the year I knew him, Sam took steps in the direction of strengthening all these connections. He engaged with subject matter and stories, he reached out in small ways to those around him, and he allowed himself to feel and to express emotion, particularly in the safe space provided by his teacher.

Revisiting Sam

When re-assessed in June, Sam's instructional level was somewhere between third and fifth grade, depending again on the genre of the text (narrative stronger than expository), although no longer on the method of reading (oral and silent reading equal). He scored within a few points of the Advanced level on the CST. At this point, his listening comprehension was actually weaker than his reading comprehension. In analyzing Sam's miscues and understanding of text, he had no clear difficulties and comprehension at all levels was much improved. The number of miscues that broke syntactical rules diminished by more than half and those that were semantically unacceptable dropped slightly. His score on the maze test increased to at least seventh grade level. More miscues involved sight words (up by a third) and fewer involved errors in decoding (down by two thirds). The number of vocabulary-related miscues stayed about the same. As noted earlier, his think alouds were richer and more strategic and his score on the Metacomprehension Strategies Index increased significantly.

Sam believed that he had learned a number of new things. In addition to knowing more about animals (from our Study Circle project) he stated that he knew more words, could figure out the topic of a passage, and remembered what he'd read. Sam insisted that he liked all the activities we'd done together in both tutorial and small group, with making books, playing Wheel of Fortune, and reading scary and funny stories at the top of his list. Unfortunately, when asked about things he enjoyed studying in his classroom, he said there were none. I worry that, without an interest in classroom content, the great strides he made in fourth grade will not hold.

Reading replaced science on Sam's list of favorite subjects. There were no significant changes in Sam's feelings about various aspects of and activities associated with reading. Of the sixteen free time activity options, playing games and going on the Internet remained his top choices; reading was now his ninth choice and writing his tenth. This seemed to conflict with the fact that he had added reading to his list of enjoyed school subjects. As was the case with Bella, he may simply have been interested in many more things than in the past and/or he was more honest with me than he had originally been.

Sam was much clearer about what it means to be a good reader. He viewed "getting the words to make sense," remembering facts, and learning as the primary purposes for reading, and, when offered several other choices, added pleasure and talking with others about books as additional reasons to read. He explained that it was not important to read every word correctly because if you make a mistake "it doesn't matter as long as you know what it means." Sam understood that even good readers sometimes have trouble as they read and that they re-read as needed to deal with difficulty. He no longer had anyone particular in mind as the best reader he knew and believed that all students could be successful readers if they had enough time to practice.

Sam's connections to books grew stronger during the spring. In addition to the *A to Z Mysteries* he'd enjoyed in the fall, Sam added the *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* and Wayside School series as favorites. When we visited the library over the summer, Sam struggled to find books that would interest him. But eventually he found that his reading had improved to such a degree that he could read independently some of the *Scary Stories* books he had previously relied on me to read aloud to him. We found some other ghost stories as well and he was hooked.

Sam now viewed himself as a great reader and thought that others saw him as a good reader, both up a level from the fall. He believed that reading easy words was now the easiest part of reading, while "going fast" was now the most difficult. This is likely due to the fact that, while Sam continued to be a smooth reader, his speed had not kept up with the "fluency" norms his school had adopted; it's likely that he now expected what he read to make sense and had to read more slowly in order to be certain it did. He noted that he now had strategies for determining word meanings (read ahead), for dealing with confusion (re-read), and for remembering what he'd read (say what happened).

Sam's father came to campus for our final interview just after school ended in June. Like his son, Mr. H is not a talkative or forthcoming person. Nevertheless, it was clear that he was pleased with Sam's progress. His first comment was that Sam was "reading a lot and know, understand a lot." He also noted that Sam seemed to enjoy both reading and writing more than before – he didn't "put up a fight" when it came time for his daily reading time.

Katya noticed ways in which Sam changed over time. By February, Katya noted that Sam's engagement with reading was quite erratic although more focused during self-select time than when they read a text as a group. She remarked that Sam seemed to enjoy mini-lessons, especially when student responses were shaped by academic sentence frames. Katya said that when asked a generic question like "What's happening in the story?" Sam was often stumped, but did better with more specific questions. She admitted that, in truth, she was focusing more on his affective and social development (a decision I fully supported). By June,

Katya emphasized Sam's greater confidence as a reader and as a member of the class. She noted that the students had recently played a math game and that Sam not only played with another child but took it upon himself to explain how the game worked. In reflecting on Sam's overall progress, Katya said, "I think he is coming more into himself and so that always helps kids academically."

Despite Katya's insistence that Sam had become more integrated into classroom life over the course of the year, there was little evidence of this on the days I was present.[12] When I visited in December, I observed him laughing with another student, answering low-inference questions, and diligently completing work. However, during my January, March, and May observations, the extent to which Sam was engaged in classroom activities seemed to depend on the proximity of his teacher; for example, when Katya was nearby, he tracked along in the text but stared into space or fiddled in his desk the moment she moved away. For partner work, Sam depended on other children to initiate contact with him and, if they did not, he typically sat silently. He did at times rely on others, taking advice from his partner when asked a question or even copying off the partner's paper. In May, the students were learning about their upcoming response to literature writing assessment. Sam was sitting with a group of five other students; when asked to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the anchor paper, three students talked amongst themselves and the other three – including Sam – did not. During the whole-class discussion that followed, Sam and the three "sharers" did not participate while the other two children who had not originally talked in the small group offered ideas. Of the six, then, Sam was the only child not to engage with the lesson in any obvious way.

Remaining Tactics and New Strategies

Of the tactics that came naturally to Sam early on, which did he continue to employ in June? In short, all of them – but to a less extreme degree. Did Sam throw himself into each classroom project? Did he raise his hand at every opportunity? Was he the proverbial life of the party? Certainly not. But he had made social as well as academic inroads over the course of the year. The class bully was even known to defend him!

Sam now had strategies that served him well. First and foremost, he now had an "algorithmic" approach to reading. Over the course of our time together, Sam had learned to adapt his systematic approach to math and apply it to a subject area that was less comfortable for him. He appreciated having a list of steps to go through for each strategy and academic sentence frames he could use to articulate his thinking. This process allowed him to construct meaning on all levels – from figuring out the meaning of unknown words; to generating, explaining, and finding evidence for predictions; to recognizing and critiquing character motivation.

For most of us, the expression of emotion is spontaneous rather than strategic, but I got the sense that, in Sam's case, he may have made a calculated choice to become more open about his feelings. As noted earlier, Sam's previous teacher insisted that he had gone two full years with a completely flat affect. Something must have changed for him in fourth grade. He cried more than once during his time with Katya and, while he was less expressive with me, he did choose to relate past experiences of sadness and loneliness. On the flip side, he latched on

[12] It is important to note that I observed in Sam's classroom for only about eleven hours over the course of the year and four of these visits occurred during the first month of school.

to books whose authors clearly had a rather bizarre sense of humor and he was known to dissolve into laughter.

Sam employed new social strategies as well. As described in the upcoming section, the other students in our small group soon viewed Sam as The Man when it came to solving the weekly Wheel of Fortune puzzle. This raised both his visibility and the level of admiration he was accorded, and I suspect this served as the foundation for his willingness to connect, at least minimally, with others in the group. Over time he was more likely to sit with others as he worked and cared enough about their assessment of his scholarly efforts that he chose to accept his final goal certificate as they looked on.

In His Element

Sam's participation in one aspect of our small group curriculum and a vignette from our tutorial work exemplify what Sam was capable of when he allowed himself to be fully caught up in a task. The first looks at Sam's involvement in the Wheel of Fortune game (and his peers' reactions to his success). The second is a segment of transcription that offers a picture of what Sam's retelling was like when he was wholly confident and engaged.

Wheel of (great good) fortune. Despite the fact that the Wheel of Fortune game drew upon Sam's greatest strengths – use of context and letter-sound correspondences – he was not immediately comfortable with it. Paul had a tendency to whisper correct word guesses to other students and, on at least one occasion early on, Sam simply repeated what Paul had said. Sam was clearly pleased with himself when he made his first independent word guess but when I told him he could take another guess, he froze and said, "Pass," even though he could have simply guessed a letter if he didn't know any of the other words. When I reminded him of this, he guessed N; this was a great guess since it is a commonly-used letter, but it didn't happen to be in this particular puzzle.

At this point, Paul said to Sam, "It's OK," because they were still beating me handily, and from this point on Sam's confidence seemed to grow. Two weeks later he waved his hand wildly during another child's turn, calling out, "I know!" This continued in future weeks with, "Oh, oh, oh!" followed by a big smile after a correct guess and great excitement after figuring out the word *information.* By November, the other students began to acknowledge Sam's level of skill. One day he guessed the word *today,* demonstrating his ability to use the macro-context of words that frequently appeared in the puzzles as well as the micro-context of surrounding words. Bella (who was quite jealous of Sam's abilities) asked, "How come he knows?" Without skipping a beat, Paul replied, "Because he's smart!" As time went on, Sam often became so engrossed in the puzzle that he could hardly contain himself while he waited for his turn. He was also now confident enough in his abilities to find his mis-guesses amusing and to smile when other children were successful in solving the puzzle.

As long as I kept laughing . . . Reviewing Sam's attempts at retelling from his initial assessments, it was amazing to see how far he'd come by March. I think this was a combination of his own awareness that he was fully capable of such an undertaking and his engrossment in the *Wayside School series*. During our last tutorial session, I asked Sam to read silently a story I was unfamiliar with and retell it. This is the segment of the transcript beginning with the arrival of two robbers in the classroom located 30 stories up from the ground floor:

Sam: And then two robbers came.

Elizabeth: So did the robbers just show up out of nowhere? They just walked into class?
Sam: Uh-hmm
Elizabeth: Oh, gosh! [laughs]
Sam: And then they hold up a gun and say, "Give me all your money."
Elizabeth: [laughs] If you were a robber, would you go to a classroom and hold it up? [laughs] I don't think so! And then what?
Sam: Then the kids tell the robbers how much money they have.
Elizabeth: Is it like a quarter and a nickel?
Sam: [nods] And then the robbers say, "Is this a bank?"
Elizabeth: [laughs]
Sam: And then the kids say, "No, it's a school."
Elizabeth: [laughs]
Sam: And the robbers say they go to 30 stories for nothing?
Elizabeth: [laughs]
Sam: And then the robber says, "Do you have anything valuable in the school?" and the kids says, "Knowledge is valuable."
Elizabeth: [laughs]
Sam: And the robbers says they want to be a scientist not a criminal.

Sam loved these stories and my laughter and occasional follow-up questions seemed to show him that his retelling was accurate and interesting enough that I could follow the plot and delight in the robbers' antics.

Looking Back and Looking Forward

So, who was Sam as we concluded our working relationship? Like Bella, in many ways, he had changed very little. He was still the quiet child who was not fully comfortable in his own skin or in the company of his peers. But in other ways Sam was quite different. He had found that if he used what he knew about subjects he was good at – a methodical approach to math, in particular – and transferred that knowledge to areas of the curriculum, primarily reading, in which he was less adept, he could be successful. He learned to predict, to offer opinions, and, to a limited degree, make connections between his own life experience and the texts he read. Sam also learned that he could express emotion, both positive and negative. I left my time with Sam fully believing that this may have been the most significant change of all. Katya and I were saddened by his tears and by occasional comments about feeling left out, but we both saw this as a necessary catharsis; he couldn't act in response to his emotions until he understood what they were. And, over time, act he did. More confident that his small group peers recognized his strengths, he reached out to them in modest but significant ways. And he began to see books like the *Wayside School* and *Scary Stories* series as a source of enjoyment. Sam, too, had joined *The Literacy Club.*

Ethan: Knowledge and Camaraderie Are My Friends

If an NFL football team were to form an elementary-level semi-pro league, they'd recruit Ethan as a lineman. He is a short and stocky rough-and-tumble kid with a gravelly voice, sparkling eyes, and a winning smile. But there is so much more to Ethan than meets the eye. He is a rabid consumer of both the nature and history television channels and has a wealth of knowledge on these topics that belies his young age.

Ethan is Latino, fully proficient in English. In the year in which I conducted my research, he moved to the Bay Area from another state where he had been retained in first grade then placed in a second/third grade multi-age classroom. Ethan's mother seemed to be unaware of his actual grade placement and, apparently based on his date of birth, he was initially placed in fourth grade at my research site. Only after his cumulative file arrived in late October was this information made known and he was moved to third grade in early November. Since I had already begun working with Ethan prior to the shift (and since he was not yet at grade level even for a third grader) his mother, teachers, and I decided that he would continue to be a part of this study. Unfortunately, due to financial hardship, he and his mother and sisters moved to a community about 80 miles away to live with relatives in February and he participated in only half of the planned tutorial and small group sessions.

Based on the Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) I employed to assess Ethan's reading, his instructional level was somewhere between first and second grade depending on the genre of the text (narrative stronger than expository), the length of the text (longer stronger than shorter), and the method of reading (oral reading stronger than silent). We had no CST scores for Ethan since he had not lived in California the previous spring. His listening comprehension was much higher than his reading comprehension. In analyzing his miscues and understanding of text, relative challenges for Ethan included sight vocabulary, phonics, structural analysis, and fluency. Relative strengths included vocabulary (both in isolation and in context) and all areas of comprehension – low-inference, high-inference, and critical/creative. A think aloud protocol demonstrated his awareness of difficulty at the word level and he could retell the story effectively, but seemed to miss the point of the fable. He engaged in no metacognitive talk unless prompted. Results on the Metacomprehension Strategy Index demonstrated that Ethan had useful strategies for preparing to read, but not for dealing with difficulty while reading. Given his strong bank of prior knowledge, his weak showing in this area may have been an anomaly or it may speak to his difficulty in accessing and applying the knowledge he has.[13]

Ethan generally enjoyed school and was interested in a variety of subjects from math to social studies to music; he hoped to become an artist. Similarly, his stores of knowledge ranged from the history of war to football to video games. Of fourteen different free time activities, he chose playing team sports as his first and video games as his second choice, with reading as #11 and writing as #12. He reported reading for about 20 minutes daily, although his mother estimated a much lower amount – approximately 45 minutes per week.[14]

Ethan's opinions about reading were all over the map. He said he generally felt good about reading because "it makes you feel smarter;" yet he stated that the longest time he'd ever wanted to read was two minutes and that (and this was unlike all the other students with whom I worked) reading wasn't really a very important thing to learn to do. His opinions about specific aspects of literacy also varied quite dramatically. He selected the term *terrible* to describe how he felt about reading at home on the weekends or during vacation or about getting a book for a present. He felt *not so good* about reading in his Open Court book, reading

[13] See complete assessment results in Appendix D.

[14] This was the first of many disparities between Ethan's and his mother's description of his reading life. She told me that she had always worked long hours and was not at home with Ethan very much; this may explain the mismatch.

aloud in class, and taking fluency tests. Answering questions about what he'd read, silent reading time, and going to the library fell in the *OK* category, while silent reading tests were *good* and reading content area textbooks was *great.*

While Ethan consistently conveyed his belief that reading is about sense-making, he viewed sounding out as the most important strategy for dealing with difficulty. He felt that someone who makes mistakes and reads slowly but understands is a better reader than someone who reads accurately and quickly but has low comprehension, and stated that it was not important to read every word correctly as long as one understood. He viewed learning new things as the primary purpose for reading. Ethan said the best reader he knows is his sister who reads aloud chapter books, and believes that even good readers may have trouble when reading but overcome this by using letter sounds to figure out unknown words. Ethan's only fix-up strategy was reading ahead and using post-word context to decode.

The extent to which Ethan's reading development was influenced by those around him was unclear. He told me he had learned to read by meeting with his teacher in a small group, but that he had never had a teacher who made reading fun and exciting. Ethan reported that his mother sometimes read with him and asked him how his book was, but she insisted that this was the exception rather than the norm. He said that he talked with teachers about what he'd read but not peers or family members, and yet he stated that peers sometimes spoke with him about his reading progress. He was more likely to read a book by an author he'd already read or that had won an award rather than one that had been recommended by an adult or peer.

Similarly, it was difficult to discern Ethan's level of connection with reading and with books. While his mother spoke about buying books for him as often as she could, he claimed that he had no books of his own and would read more if he could find books that interested him. Ethan told me that he selected books based on the cover picture, that he liked to read scary stories, and that his favorite books were Goosebumps and Captain Underpants (both well-above his current reading level). He mentioned two of the *Magic Tree House* series (Osborne, 1992-2012) as the books he'd read in the past month, but when asked what books he had recently read *and enjoyed*, he could provide no examples. It was quite clear to me that the books Ethan was drawn to were currently too challenging for him and, not surprisingly, those at his level could not hold his interest. He loved *starting* new books, but was regularly disappointed, either by their content or by his inability to navigate them successfully.

When asked to speak generally about his reading, Ethan's self-evaluation shared some commonalities with the assessments I conducted. He said that reading "medium" words and understanding what he'd read were the easiest parts of reading. Ethan selected reading with expression – the aspect of reading that he considered most challenging – as his primary reading goal. Nevertheless, when it came to the more specific elements of reading, Ethan and I often disagreed about his strengths and challenges. For example, I rated his ability to figure out the meaning of difficult words as a strength while he saw this as challenging; on the flip side, he felt he could easily read sight words, while I noted the many times when he misread these words. He also said that he viewed himself as an OK reader and believed others would say the same, despite the fact that he was nearly three years behind his age mates.

In mid-November I spoke with Ethan's mother. When asked to reflect on her son's positive attributes, she noted that he is outgoing and sociable, but was unable to list any

reading strengths. She seemed quite surprised when I mentioned that his comprehension was exceptional. She knew that Ethan struggled with decoding and stated that he would often ask how to pronounce words; she saw this as a promising change from a time when he was more likely skip words he didn't immediately recognize, a change she attributed to his growing confidence. Still, he continued to comment that reading was "too hard," a pattern that had begun in kindergarten. As far as she knew, he received no supplemental reading support before moving to California. Ethan's mother told me that, when they visited the library, he always wanted to check out lots of books and that, when she could afford it, she would buy them to "give him the comfort of his own books." She believed he was most interested in baseball and basketball and not in art. Ms. B told me that she's "not a reader" – that reading has always seemed boring to her, although she had recently gotten caught up in the *Twilight Saga* series her daughters read. As a child, she was apparently placed in a class for Spanish-speaking English learners (she initially referred to this as special education) and reading was always hard for her. She said a good reader is one who "loves books . . . . [is] all in it," and understands what is read.

Libby, Ethan's original (fourth grade) teacher, viewed him as a child who would shift regularly from being spacey to right on point. He played a lot in his (always messy) desk and had a great deal of trouble with oral directions. In her opinion, he didn't seem to have strong feelings about reading one way or the other, although he wanted very much to read the same books as other, more able readers. Libby noted that Ethan participated actively during social studies and read aloud time and showed an extraordinary sense of historical time. She told me that he needed substantial support to complete class assignments but worked hard.

When I observed Ethan at the beginning of October (during the time he spent in fourth grade), he regularly talked and listened during Turn and Talk time. Some of his comments and questions were tangential but most were on-track and quite sophisticated. For example, he asked how people on an African game preserve could eat if they were not allowed to hunt and later inferred from a picture that, since the main character had the hills at his back, he was closer to the poachers than he had been earlier in the story. He also knew that it was important to remain still in the presence of a lion because it would attack if it felt threatened. On the other hand, Ethan typically did not attend during reading time. He rarely followed along in his text as the teacher read aloud and he tended to self-distract when he was supposed to be reading silently – dropping his pencil and fiddling with things; when pressed, he admitted to a lack of focus.

In November, after Ethan had moved to third grade, he seemed disconnected during most of the group lessons. He did as he was told each time a direction was given, but quickly returned to self-distracting behaviors when his teacher was at a greater physical distance. While the third grade reading materials were closer to his instructional reading level, allowing him to decode more effectively, there seemed to be no room in this classroom for Ethan to share his vast store of untapped prior knowledge or demonstrate his remarkable high-level thinking skills. The rather dramatic inconsistency between the two observations highlighted the role of classroom context in mitigating and/or exacerbating reading difficulties.

So, who was Ethan as we entered into our working relationship? For one, he was less than thrilled about working with me. In fact, he "remembered" that I had told him he would be

attending the small group sessions only (a setting in which he was happy and relaxed). However, this anxiety seemed to diminish in the first few weeks as his comfort level, confidence, and engagement began to grow. He even admitted "I kind of like . . ." in response to several activities and occasionally asked to read further when he had the option to stop for the day. We had initially chosen reading with expression as his first goal because it had been the only aspect of reading we both agreed was a challenge for him. But when I mentioned that mastering a few commonly-missed sight words and working on phonics and structural analysis first might serve to facilitate that more advanced skill, he readily agreed – I believe because he had come to trust me to help him make good decisions. He was very happy to attain his first sub-goal (high frequency words and basic phonics elements) and to receive his first goal certificate in one of our small group meetings; he asked (twice) at our next tutorial session, "Will we work on a new goal now?"

More than any of the other students, Ethan had great passions. He knew more about the Civil War and other seemingly arcane topics than I did, and his curiosity was insatiable . . . as long as he didn't have to read. Much as Ethan loved studying science and social studies, there simply were not texts at his level that dealt with topics that were of intense interest to him and this was a source of frustration. In our tutorial sessions, I read aloud to him a great deal in order to give him access to the subjects he cared about, but in class he avoided reading like the plague, adopting any number of behaviors designed to pass the time without drawing attention to himself.

Ethan was aware of his basic strengths and challenges. He knew he was weak at decoding and good at comprehension and, probably suspected that the world of school valued the former over the latter. And yet, he was somewhat in the dark about the details of his reading profile, especially the difficulties he had with high frequency words and basic phonics. Because he could generally understand whatever he read, he also seemed blind to the fact that even he needed to monitor his comprehension and deal with whatever roadblocks he found, rather than gloss over them.

While Ethan's initial response to me was rather remote – I suspect because he associated me with a part of school that he disliked and that undermined his natural self-confidence and ebullience – he quickly warmed to our shared project. Nevertheless, he was always happiest in the small group setting. His peers recognized and appreciated his keen intellect and sophisticated sense of humor and he thrived in an environment that both appealed to his passionate interest in the animal kingdom and supported his reading progress.

Ethan's Tactics

What tactics did Ethan employ in his approach to text? When compared to the other students, Ethan had a smaller repertoire of tactics. As was true of Bella and Sam, some of the tactics were specifically related to literacy while others were applied more generally to the world as a whole. Ethan shared with Bella the tendency to ask me to repeat directions. With Sam, Ethan shared low risk-taking behavior manifested as the tendency to decline challenges. Unique to Ethan's profile was his tendency to mumble or skip over words he didn't immediately recognize, his complete confidence with respect to comprehension of text (a tactic which was a mixed blessing for him), and his strong relationships with peers.

Getting to Know Ethan

As is true of all the children I studied, Ethan's basic personality and approach to the world remained quite stable over the course of our time together, but there were changes as well. I'll begin by looking at his affective and social dispositions, next examine his academic characteristics, and then look at the built connections that served to bridge the space between the two realms. Finally, I'll return to an examination of the "elephant in the room" he shared with Bella – his ongoing illness during the winter.

The affective/social realm. There were two significant affective/social aspects of Ethan's character. The first was his desire to improve and to publically demonstrate improvement via goal-setting; while it appeared that Ethan was initially unfamiliar with choosing and working toward goals, he quickly made both this process and the related rhetoric his own. The second was his great enjoyment of our small group times. He had a natural affinity for social relationships and he expanded his repertoire of friendship-crafting strategies to include interactions around academic content.

Goal-setting, goal-achievement, and acknowledgment by peers. Goal-setting did not appear to be a motivational tool Ethan had previously experienced. After I talked about my expectations for the students on the first day of Study Circle, he asked, "Are we going to like get probably awards if we're working hard?" I was a bit taken aback. I explained that I hoped we'd be having experiences together that would make such things unnecessary and he seemed willing to give me the benefit of the doubt, but clearly he was more familiar with a learning environment where carrots and sticks played a prominent role. When Bella received her first goal certificate, Ethan was intrigued, asking, "Will I start getting the thingies [certificates]?" As noted earlier, after he completed his first goal (sight words and basic phonics), he began to see the academic world through a goal-setting lens, asking me immediately and forcefully if we would be working on a new goal now. He also referred to our book-writing project as a "goal" that all the students were working on. I sometimes suspected that Ethan was more engaged by the *demonstration* of competence than he was in the *development* of competence (Kaplan & Maehr, 2002). Nevertheless, this interest seemed to propel his progress. From the first, he requested that I present him with his goal certificates in the small group setting, pleased that his peers would acknowledge and celebrate his efforts.

Comfort in the Study Circle setting. Whereas Bella always seemed most at ease in tutorial and Sam seemed a bit on edge in both environments, Ethan clearly thrived in the small group setting. He expressed more positive emotions there (primarily enthusiasm/interest) as compared with our tutorial sessions. It seemed as if he could just relax and enjoy himself in a way he could not in the intensity of our partnership, and his interactions with other students were a delight to witness.

Emotional tone. Ethan did not hide his zeal when something captured his imagination. On many occasions in both tutorial and small group, he expressed his great enthusiasm for one thing or another, but this was more likely to happen when he was with his peers. In addition, the cause of this enthusiasm shifted subtly across the two settings. In tutorial, he was most likely to express excitement when we were talking about a subject of long-standing interest. For example, during the period of time when we were reading a story about the actions of the Minutemen at Lexington and Concord, he read ahead while I stepped out of the room briefly

and when I returned he said, “I like the old kind of wars.” It was at this time that I came to understand that, unlike many kids who read war-related books, it was not the violence that intrigued Ethan, but rather the historical content and depiction of personal bravery. There were times when he was enthusiastic about his own performance (e.g., when his prior knowledge about the size of the largest beetle was confirmed in the text) or about information on a previously unknown topic such as architecture, but most of his interest in tutorial was associated with tried-and-true topics.

In small group, Ethan was most likely to get excited about the activities themselves – Wheel of Fortune (e.g., running up to the board to point out where his guess fit in the puzzle), the idea of becoming an author (“It will be like my first book!” he enthused), watching a movie to add to his list of facts about sharks, and composing his About the Author page. His interest in learning new things about other topics was even more pronounced in this setting. As he listened to the notes taken by other children, he was intrigued to learn that different books on the same subject could contain conflicting information, that baby warthogs were pink, and that wolves ate many different things (“Dang, lots of stuff!” he remarked) and could run 50 miles without resting. In this setting, his curiosity about the information offered by others tempered his preoccupation with his own concerns. While some of this may have reflected Ethan’s desire to form strong connections with his peers, his interest in their topics seemed genuine.

Interactions with peers. As Ethan’s mother noted in our initial interview, Ethan was an outgoing and sociable child and was definitely in his element during our small group time. Although he didn’t exactly fill the stereotypical “class clown” role, there was a certain levity to most of his interactions and he was very popular with the other children. Even after Ethan moved to third grade, he continued to spend Friday afternoons with Libby, and his former classmates were always happy to see him. Ethan was particularly attached to Paul, a child who came to Study Circle but not tutorial, and learned some tips about supporting his pals from him. We had talked at some length on our first day of Study Circle about the importance of establishing a community of learners where people felt comfortable taking risks. Later that day, a child made an incorrect guess while playing Wheel of Fortune and Paul said, “It’s OK.” I emphasized the kindness of this remark and a few minutes later when Paul mis-guessed, Ethan chimed in, “That’s all right, man.” Long after Ethan was no longer his classmate, Paul claimed enthusiastically, “He’s my best friend!” They also kidded each other in a light-hearted way. I video-taped most of our Study Circle sessions and was regularly frustrated by the students’ tendency to clown for the camera. At one point I reminded them that I watched the video every week and would see every little thing they did. Almost immediately, Paul resumed waving his arms and Ethan remarked matter-of-factly, “She looks at it [the video] every day, man. She’s obviously gonna know.” When I confirmed this, he added, “[I] got nothin’ to hide.” Ethan could accept kidding as well as dish it out. One day he complained pitifully about not wanting to draw as many illustrations as he’d intended. I was attempting to extricate myself from this exchange and make my way over to another student. “I’ll be right there,” I said to Bella. “I just got a little discombobulated because Ethan is trying to drive me out of my mind, aren’t you?” Ethan made “Jaws” noises in response.

Ethan had positive connections to other children as well. Bella was especially aware of Ethan's intelligence. When we discussed the information they had gathered about the animals they were researching, the following exchange occurred:

Ethan (to Sam): How cold can they [wolves] survive?

Sam: I don't know.

Ethan: I always give the hard questions to know!

Bella: Maybe you're smart.

I sometimes wondered if Bella felt a sense of competition with Ethan. Her assertions of knowledge seemed often to be offered "for effect" while Ethan's seemed to spring from his irrepressible sense of excitement. Nevertheless, when Ethan received his first goal certificate, Bella exclaimed, "Good job!" and patted him on the back as others gave him High Fives. To wrap up the end of our Study Circle, we played Jeopardy using questions whose answers were in the books they'd written. Paul and Ethan achieved a lopsided victory over Sam and Bella. I worried momentarily that there would be gloating by the winners; instead Ethan said cheerily, "Good job everybody!" We didn't know at the time that this would be Ethan's last day with us; he was sorely missed.

Summary.

Like each of the other children in this study, Ethan is a unique personality. While insisting that learning to read well was really not very important for the life he envisioned for himself, he loved the idea of setting goals, working to achieve them, and, of possibly greatest importance, receiving acknowledgment of his achievement by his peers. Unlike Bella, who thrived in the tutorial setting, Ethan was most at home in our small group sessions. Part of this can be attributed to the content-area focus of Study Circle. He allowed himself to get caught up in learning as much as he could about sharks and publishing his book on the subject. But of equal importance were the academically-oriented relationships he built in this context. Participation in our little community of scholars was, I believe, the foundation for the substantive progress he made over the course of our time together and for a developing sense of academic identity.

The academic realm. The disparity between Ethan's academic strengths and challenges may have been the greatest of the three students included in this dissertation. The black stuff on the page – the part of reading that Sam managed easily – was (and to a great degree remained) Ethan's nemesis. He never fully grasped the way letters and sounds fit together systematically; I suspect his progress may be attributable more to an expansion in his capacity to compensate for this difficulty rather than the ability to overcome it. Yet, the breadth and depth of Ethan's knowledge never failed to amaze me. When some topic caught his interest, his curiosity was insatiable, even when it required conceptual skills that would make many a high school student blanch. Ethan used this vast store of knowledge to negotiate texts that seemed far too difficult for him, although there were times when his confidence in his abilities blinded him to the fact that he did not fully grasp the content of what he'd read.

Print as primary obstacle. Ethan challenges the commonly-held view that a reader cannot understand without fluent decoding. During our initial assessments, he misread common sight words (e.g., *could, friend, her,* and *thought),* he struggled with vowel sounds in short decodable words (e.g., *blade* and *jaw*), and he correctly read only a third of the multi-

syllable words on the Names Test. Ethan's oral reading accuracy for a third grade narrative passage was 92% (87% if self-corrected miscues were counted as errors), he frequently repeated words and phrases, and his reading rate was 43 words per minute (less than half that expected for this grade level). Nevertheless, Ethan's understanding of this passage was all-but-complete: strong retell, 95% accuracy at the low-inference level, 66% at the high-inference level, and 100% at the critical level.

Ethan's struggles with both decoding and encoding continued throughout our work together. He frequently misread sight words (*have* for *live*, for example) and substituted one easily decodable word for another (*growl* for *glow*). This was true even when the words appeared within supportive context (e.g., *Beetles live almost everywhere in the world.* or *This beetle can glow in the dark*.) I taught Ethan how to read a multiplicity of words by substituting a different initial sound at the beginning of a known word; he would do this successfully for a number of words and then, inexplicably, falter (e.g., *bake, flake, make, quack [for quake], sake, shake, take, walk [for wake]*). I noticed early on that he always pronounced the word *the* as *thee* when he read but not when he spoke; I asked him about this and he replied, "I get confused because they look the same," and when I explained that, in fact, they were the same, he looked puzzled. We played Wheel of Fortune together in tutorial as well as at small group time. Ethan regularly guessed words that didn't fit with the letters already available. When he saw the letters *he_*, he guessed the word *him* and when he saw *_ote*, he selected *f* as a probable beginning letter. Multi-syllable words were an even greater challenge. Sometimes he substituted nonsense words (e.g., *instingly* for *interesting*) and did not self-correct. On other occasions he would misread a word such as *county* for *country*, self-correct, and then miscue on the same word farther along in the passage. One day he read *Clevin War* for *Civil War* and, when I provided the correct pronunciation, he laughed as if to say, "How could I make a mistake on a word I know so well?" Spelling longer words was equally problematic. When writing the About the Author page for his book on sharks, Ethan told me he did not know how to spell Martin, his middle name. During our Making Big Words time (Cunningham & Hall, 1994) he spelled *motorcycles* as *cyclemotors* and, at one point sort of threw up his hands and said, "This is my arch-enemy – I don't know how to spell."

Ethan employed a number of different tactics in order to compensate for his decoding/encoding difficulties. He told me that he would frequently skip over words he didn't know at sight when reading silently and, in a parallel move, tended to mumble when he was reading aloud and came to a word he didn't recognize. Ethan would also avoid reading aloud when he could, asking me, "Do I have to read it all?" or, when I attempted to take a running record, "Like read the whole book AGAIN?" During our Making Words practice, Ethan regularly asked me to restate directions (e.g., Now that you've spelled *aim*, add two letters to make *claim*) or simply repeat the word I'd asked him to spell. Since this was the only time he asked me to say things multiple times, I began to suspect that this was a sort of stall tactic used to buy time until he could think through what he was to do. Ethan also tended to rationalize his difficulties. This occasionally occurred with respect to word meanings or factual information, but it was by far most common during decoding/encoding situations. He most frequently attributed to poor memory or failure of sight or hearing that which was likely caused by lack of skill. For example, he said that he had misspelled a word because "I didn't see the end." When

he spelled *grant* as *gant* and I emphasized the /r/ sound, he replied, "Oh, I didn't hear it." And his explanation for spelling *stern* as *stren* was, "I forgot."

Curiosity and stores of knowledge. Of all the children I've worked with over the course of my career, Ethan may be the most knowledgeable and curious child I've known. He had a wide array of miscellaneous facts at his disposal, garnered largely from movies and television – facts about pandas, lions, wolves, beetles, spiders, and police officers. But his deepest store of data related to war history. Some of this was not completely correct; he initially believed, for example, that the Revolutionary War was fought between North and South America (possibly confusing this war with the Civil War and North and South America with the northern and southern parts of America). But most of his knowledge was remarkably accurate. Ethan knew that cannons were used as weapons and that New Hampshire was, as he put it, a "freedom state" during the Revolutionary War. He was aware that Paul Revere was a silversmith and knew of his famous pronouncement, "One if by land and two if by sea."

Ethan asked a lot of content-related questions, too. As might be expected, many were connected to war history: did the Tea Party take place in Boston? was George Washington alive during the War of 1812? were photographs taken during the Civil War? But Ethan also was very curious about topics that were less familiar to him. He was intrigued by a book called *Amazing Buildings* (Hayden, 2003) and wanted to know what was inside them, whether Malaysians used air conditioning, whether the country of Dubai was rich because of their large oil reserves, and whether individual people could sell the oil contained within the boundaries of their land. Ethan most certainly had his "pet" topics but he was open to learning about anything and everything.

Understanding on all levels. As noted earlier, Ethan's ability to understand what he read was his greatest strength. His knowledge of word meanings was above average and his retelling, low-inference, high-inference, and critical comprehension when reading narrative texts was exceptional, even when his reading accuracy was at the frustration level. While Ethan made miscues during our tutorial sessions, few of them were vocabulary-based and he was able to see connections between seemingly disparate terms (e.g., British, Redcoats, and Lobsterbacks). Even when he did not initially understand a particular word, he was often able to figure it out via context; he first thought that *proclamation* was a synonym for war, but when I noted that one would not *pass* a war (as in pass a proclamation), he determined that it was a law. Ethan had a strong grasp of figurative language as well. When a story about the Civil War stated that the boy who played the drums was "drumming us to glory," he commented that this meant the boy was helping them get to "freedom and their rights." When reading about the Revolutionary War, Ethan could describe the various people involved, infer the outcomes of battles based on the listing of casualties, and explain the reasons behind the Revolution. He even seemed to fully understand the Declaration of Rights and the process by which it was delivered to, and ultimately rejected by, King George.

Fortunately, Ethan's reading identity was as linked to his strong comprehension as it was to his issues with decoding and spelling. When we began work on self-monitoring, however, this strong self-concept hindered his progress. Initially, I presented a series of sentences that were intentionally confusing. Under these circumstances, he did quite well – noting all the problems with individual words and about two thirds of the difficulties caused not by words

themselves but by the way those words were used (e.g., The weight of the trees was caused by the power of the house). Once we began reading from unaltered texts, Ethan was less able to make these judgments. He commonly noted words that caused him difficulty, but, like Sam (a child with a completely opposite reading profile), frequently insisted that he understood confusing passages. When I asked him to explain what he'd read, he would respond by saying, "It was about . . ." or "I can't really explain it, but I know what it means." This did not improve over time.

Summary. Ethan's struggles with print did not abate over the course of our time together. His rich store of background knowledge and innate intelligence served him remarkably well in his effort to compensate for his difficulties. Nevertheless from the day we first met until our last session together, Ethan's interest in reading independently did not grow. In his mind, he could further his search for information easily and happily by watching the sophisticated television programs he enjoyed. Reading just slowed him down.

Connecting the affective/social and academic realms: Bonds to academics with people. From the outset, Ethan had strong connections to subjects of particular interest to him such as animals and history, and he was also naturally sociable, making friends easily. I've already described these characteristics at some length. Over time, Ethan also formed connections with the process of our work together. And, in the Study Circle setting, all three of these connections combined to support his book on sharks.

Connections to process. On the first day of Study Circle when Ethan asked whether the students would be receiving rewards for doing their best, it was clear to me that he wanted to understand the way this new world worked and what role he played in it. Over time he asked me many questions about the process of our interaction. He wanted to know whether he'd be making illustrations for his book, when he could use the Internet to do research, if it was possible to combine all the letter tiles I had to form one enormous word, why so many of the words I asked him to spell included the prefix *re-*, and what activities we would use to help him improve his structural analysis skills.

To a certain degree, this involved connecting to me personally as well. Ethan expressed some interest in my two children: which one was in college, which one was working, and which one had written the book I shared with them. But most of his questions and comments involved our work together. Since he was having difficulty finding books he liked in the school library, he wanted to know where I got all the books I brought in for him to read. He asked when I would work with him next and, whenever I said a formal good-bye, he would respond in kind: "I'll see you next week, too." Despite his initial reluctance to meet with me, he seemed to decide early on that the activities we did together were OK and maybe I was, too.

Connections to research and writing. From the first day of Study Circle, Ethan was an active and enthusiastic participant at every step of the book-writing process and his thinking was highly conceptual. I wanted the students to understand what it meant to "study" a topic, but felt it might be easier if they talked about something more tangible first. So I asked them to describe what it meant to swim. While other students struggled to explain their thinking or focused on very concrete aspects like moving arms and legs, Ethan explained that swimming was a skill that one learned and it involved a variety of elements like wearing the proper attire. When we shifted to talking about studying, Ethan noted that it involved hard work. He

contributed several ideas to our list of things we might study, including how machines work and the history of their school or of California. Once we settled on animals as our over-arching topic, Ethan suggested some of the most interesting: "over-sized lizard" (Komodo dragon), eagle, and rhinoceros. He recommended that we take a trip to the zoo as part of our efforts to learn about these animals.

Ethan was also very skilled at note-taking. I taught them this process by writing a sentence on the board and asking them to tell me what words could be deleted. He caught on to this immediately. From the sentence" Iguanas are found on just one island in the Caribbean," Ethan knew straightaway that we could delete *found, just,* and *one.* Once students understood that we did not copy verbatim from our research sources, we worked together to take notes on pandas, beginning with prior knowledge before moving on to reading our reference materials. Ethan was able to select important information and tell me whether it belonged, for example, on the Where They Live or the What They Eat notes page. When it came time to transfer this skill to independent work on his animal-of-choice (sharks), he got to work immediately and continued diligently for the rest of the hour. As we watched a shark video together, he regularly told me what to take notes on for him. As time went on, Ethan was delighted to share his notes-in-progress and was fascinated to learn that different sources might provide conflicting information.

Before students began to write their drafts, we met to ask each other what we'd learned. While some of the students seemed to be going through the motions, just repeating questions that were part of the organizing structure of their note-taking (e.g., What does X eat? Where does X live?), Ethan's questions were clearly genuine. He wanted to know what animals were predators of coyotes and which were prey of warthogs. Other students had to look back at their notes to search for the answers to questions; Ethan, on the other hand, responded easily and accurately to all queries.

As the drafting process got underway, Ethan's enthusiasm only grew. The physical act of writing did not come easily to him and spelling was a source of great frustration. Yet, he was committed to what he wanted to say and stuck with it. Early on I had read aloud a book my own son had written at about their age, including his About the Author page. Ethan was especially excited about writing his own version of this special page, listing his many interests as my son had done. Once the draft was complete, he began work on his illustrations, many of which were quite amusing. In one such picture we see only a person's legs hanging down into the water with a shark circling below. In another, the shark's egg case was drawn to resemble a suitcase, complete with handle. Initially Ethan had intended to place an illustration on each and every page, but burned out partway through leaving a somewhat lopsided monograph. All in all, however, he delighted in researching, writing, and book-making and formed even closer connections with peers through this process.

Summary. All of the children in this study formed links between academics and peers and each did so in unique ways. Ethan bonded with other students and then employed the delight he found in friendship to fortify his academic efforts. When peers were not present, he shifted his focus to connecting his natural interests to the new strategies he was learning and to figuring out his place in the process of working together. He was at his best when all of these

elements melded together to make a Perfect Storm of activity – working on a topic of interest via a process with which he felt comfortable while in the presence of friends.

The elephant in yet another living room: Illness and absence. As was true of Bella, Ethan was sick off and on from mid-December through mid-February. Even when he was at school, his energy and engagement dropped dramatically on days when he was not feeling his best. He shared with Bella a diminished assertiveness and asked far fewer questions – about texts, about the process of lessons, and in an effort to gain clarification. At these times, Ethan struggled even more with aspects of literacy that were never easy for him. On one occasion, for example, I ended a Making Big Words session in midstream; it became clear to me that it was pointless to continue since he was making mistakes that he never would have made on other days and was very frustrated. Despite the fact that he was fully capable of recognizing when his miscues disrupted meaning, he self-corrected very little during this time period. Ethan explored fewer connections to prior knowledge and to other texts, he was less self-confident/more self-critical, and less willing to accept challenges. While I got to see Bella emerge from the doldrums, Ethan moved away before he was fully well.

Revisiting Ethan

Since Ethan left my research site just after his fifteenth tutorial session, I drove to his new home to conduct what was to be his midpoint, but was now his final, assessment. I had only an hour or so to complete this, so the data I have for Ethan is incomplete. At this point, Ethan's instructional level was somewhere between early and mid-third grade level when reading narrative text. In analyzing Ethan's miscues, he continued to struggle with sight words and decoding. Oddly, the number of miscues that broke syntactical rules increased by a third, and those that were semantically unacceptable increased by half. Twice as many miscues involved sight words, and decoding issues dropped by about half. The number of vocabulary-related miscues remained stable. Ethan's score on the Names Test was actually slightly lower than in the fall. Overall, Ethan's reading level was significantly higher; yet when it came to particular skills, he made more errors. Despite the fact that his mother assured me that Ethan was glad to see me, he seemed ill-at-ease and distracted throughout our assessment session, and didn't even appear to be interested in the cards his friends had made for me to bring to him. I suspect that, knowing full well that we were no longer part of his life in any genuine way, he just disconnected from them, from me, and from any activity I had hoped to accomplish.

Due to Ethan's lack of interest, I felt able to ask only a few of the interview questions I had planned. He said that reading aloud in class was now OK and fluency tests were good. He continued to dislike reading (the amount of time he wanted to read at any given time dropped from two to one minute); he could name no favorite author or favorite book or even something he'd enjoyed reading recently. I think it's possible, however, that he had not yet been successful in finding books he enjoyed; he had loved the book I'd given him for Christmas and rated getting a book for a present as OK rather than terrible as he had in the fall. I emphasized that his reading was now strong enough that finding interesting books at his level would be easier, but he appeared unconvinced. When asked to rate himself as a reader, Ethan now said he could read faster and was now a great reader; he believed others saw him as a good reader. In the fall when I'd asked Ethan what he did when he became confused while reading, he stated

unequivocally that he never got confused. This time he said that he would figure the problem out by thinking.

Later in the spring, I interviewed the third grade teacher who had had Ethan in his classroom while he was still at my research site. Jack told me that, in his view, Ethan was willing to read if a topic was interesting to him and/or if he could do so in a social setting. Self-select reading time allowed for the former and guided reading time for the latter. Whole group instruction in their Open Court text did not appeal to Ethan and, unlike his time in fourth grade, he rarely raised his hand to participate.

These remarks reflected what I'd seen in observations of Ethan in January. In short, he was much more interested in the exploits of his friends than he was in the lesson of the moment. In one sequence he got out his guided reading book as directed, talked with friends until the teacher told him to begin reading (six minutes after the original request), opened and closed his book twice, made arm motions, and blew his nose and threw the tissue in the trash. At this point, the teacher moved him to another desk and helped him find his place in the book. Ethan then read for one minute, dug in a pencil box, showed his paper to another student, made a shooting motion with a pencil, and looked around. During a self-evaluation time at the end of class, he gave himself five out of a possible five points for working hard!

Remaining (Sometimes Modified) Tactics and New Strategies

Of the tactics that Ethan employed in the fall, which did he continue to use in June? In short, most of them, albeit in slightly modified ways. He did more silent and less oral reading, but I suspect he continued to skip over words he didn't know. Ethan tended to decline challenges when he was unsure of himself. He still asked me to repeat directions on a regular basis while working on his area of least confidence – spelling during our Making Big Words time. However, he began to supplement these requests with more helpful clarifying questions: about details relating to the Wheel of Fortune game, whether he could draw a picture rather than make a list of words, when he would be using the Internet, etc. He would also explicitly say that he didn't understand some specific element of a direction. Ethan continued to feel good about his ability to understand and remember information gained from text, but, by the end of our time together, he became more willing to acknowledge that there were times when he did not fully grasp what he had read. And while in his classroom he interacted with peers in ways that were unrelated to, or even undermined, his studies, during our small group time his connections to his friends built, and were built on, a foundation of academic work.

From the beginning, Ethan's natural enthusiasm for a range of subjects was a Strategy that served him well. He most certainly had his favorite topics – war history, in particular – but, as exemplified by his curiosity about the many types of architecture presented in the book *Amazing Buildings*, he was very open-minded about expanding his repertoire of interests. Ethan also adopted several new reading strategies over the course of our time together. When I assessed his decoding skills in isolation, there was no measurable growth. However, his reading level (oral reading of narrative text) increased about one and one half years in the semester we worked together, so clearly he employed decoding strategies in context that were not evident when tested in isolation. As noted earlier, Ethan began to look at his academic development as a process of goal-setting. In adopting this Strategy, he positioned himself as a powerful learner as opposed to a child who did as (s)he was told, a role that had never seemed

comfortable for him. He expanded his control in other ways, too. Once he decided that working with me was acceptable to him, he made decisions about the content of our work together – typically what books he would read – with ease. Beginning in January, Ethan took on a stronger leadership role. He not only decided what his goal would be (figuring out multi-syllable words) but he also offered suggestions about ways to work on the goal, how to decide the specifics of the goal, how to measure his progress, and how long a time he believed it would take to reach the goal. He also reprimanded me for not having enough tiles to complete his Making Big Words work, reminded me what we were supposed to read and where we'd left off the previous day, and questioned my choice of activities. These Strategy elements placed him in a stronger position, both for literacy and for life in general.

In His Element

One particular vignette from our tutorial work, defines who Ethan was and is – an intensely curious child whose talents were not always fully recognized. In this transcribed segment, Ethan interrupted our work with phonograms to tell me about a new classroom development.

Ethan: We got seven crayfish for science.

Elizabeth: In your classroom? How big are they?

Ethan: The smallest one is like this and our medium one is like this and the biggest one is like this [shows length with his fingers]. We have seven because we have seven tables. So when we're studying them we each get one.

Elizabeth: Cool, so is it like in a container on your desk?

Ethan: In a box and you can pick it up. We started observing them, like looking at them. We were seeing what it would do if you picked them up. One of them almost clawed me.

Elizabeth: [laughs] Are you reading about them and talking about them, too, or . . .

Ethan: Yeah, we're making up rules.

Elizabeth: Rules?

Ethan: Yeah, how to treat the crayfish and stuff.

Elizabeth: Oh, so they're happy and healthy? Did you name them?

Ethan: I don't know if we're going to do that.

Elizabeth: I mean when you get to know somebody that good, they ought to have a name I think [laughs].

Ethan: Well . . .

On this occasion a new topic of interest had fallen into Ethan's lap without any effort on his part. He was clearly enjoying the experience and happy to share his newfound knowledge with others. Ethan approached the crayfish as he did any kind of novelty in his world – as an opportunity to experiment, to learn, and to enjoy.

Looking Back and Looking Forward

So, who was Ethan as we concluded our working relationship? He had made progress on a number of fronts. Ethan's decoding skills had improved. He came to understand that he could receive help with an area of learning that was hard for him in a way that did not insult his intelligence. This freed him to admit that, even in aspects of reading that came easily for him – vocabulary and comprehension – there would be times when he needed to acknowledge and

take steps to deal with difficulty. Ethan also developed a new academic identity, that of goal setter; I believe this appealed to his desire to see concrete progress and to be recognized by his peers for what he'd done.

Like the other children, he had, in many ways, changed very little. He remained deeply passionate and knowledgeable about topics that fascinated him, as well as continuing to develop new interests as he encountered them. Maintaining strong relationships with other children was also a concern that remained throughout the semester. When there was an opportunity to interact with friends on an academic project such as the animal books the children wrote and produced, this met his social needs; when there was no such opportunity he resorted to joking and play-fighting with his peers. And, while he was more than willing to tackle books that promised to provide him with the information he sought, there was no real evidence that Ethan felt a connection to books in general or to the act of reading per se. It was clear that *The Literacy Club* had offered him membership, but not at all clear that Ethan had accepted.

All three of these children were third/fourth graders in an urban elementary school that served a poor community and they all were, by my definition, vulnerable readers. Bella, Sam, and Ethan shared in the task of dealing with those vulnerabilities in their on-going efforts to become literate, vulnerabilities that were played out in the affective/social and academic realms and in the intersection between those realms. The next chapter will consider the quality and extent of the vulnerabilities they experienced through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

Chapter 4: Bella, Sam, and Ethan Within the Literacy Ecology

As noted in the introduction to this dissertation, I have used Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory as the lens through which to conduct a cross-case analysis of the three children described in the previous chapter. As a brief review, Bronfenbrenner asserts that human development (in this case the cultivation of vulnerable readers) can be fully understood only if elements within the child's ecology, as well as the cognitive and affective characteristics of the child her/himself, are considered. This ecology includes proximal factors (microsystems) such as texts read; tasks chosen, or assigned to perform, while reading; and people in the reader's immediate environment (school-based adults, peers, and family members). It also includes distal factors such as test and textbook publishers; health care providers and insurance companies; and policy makers (e.g., school boards). Macrosystem factors such as class, race, and gender, as well as change in the ecology over time, are also relevant. Possibly of greatest significance, are the mesosystem sites where several of these factors intersect. Within the context of this study, these sites include tutorial sessions (reader/text/task/school-based adult) and small group meetings (reader/text/task/school-based adult/peers). I'll begin by looking at within-the-reader characteristics; then consider each child's microsystem connections; look at the mesosystem sites noted above; and finally, consider exo-, chrono-, and macrosystem influences.

Within-Child Characteristics

Despite the fact that vulnerable readers are often presumed to be a homogeneous group, recent studies have shown that this is not the case. Children who score at the same level on group-administered standardized tests may have radically different profiles when assessed using diagnostic instruments (Buly & Valencia, 2002; Rupp & Lesaux, 2006). As the individual case studies from the previous chapters have certainly made clear, the three children described in this study offer additional evidence for this phenomenon. Bella had relatively strong decoding skills and low-inference comprehension as we began our work together; her primary challenge involved a weak vocabulary base and difficulty figuring out the meaning of words from context. Sam, in contrast, was quite fluent, but he had a great deal of trouble answering comprehension questions and even more difficulty retelling what he'd read without support. Demonstrating yet another profile, Ethan struggled to decode even simple words, yet he clearly understood what he read at a high-inference and critical/creative as well as low-inference level.

As Bronfenbrenner suggests, these children affected, and were affected by, their ecology. In the case of these three children, it seemed to be their personalities, more than their academic characteristics, which created that effect. Bella hesitated to speak in the whole-group setting. It was her willingness to engage with others in pairs and small groups, however, that most influenced her classroom environment. While she struggled academically, this was not immediately apparent to an outside observer because she was fully engaged most of the time and, by participating actively, if quietly, she helped create the community of learners her teacher so valued. Her tenacity, particularly with respect to benchmark assessments, may also have contributed to a culture of academic engagement. Sam's influence was less immediately evident because he tended to keep to himself. However, it is children like Sam who provide the glue that maintains classroom cohesion. He was a calming influence and a number of the less

settled boys in the classroom were drawn to him. In the two months Ethan had spent in fourth grade, he had become a strong presence in that classroom. He was known for his intelligence and his ability to stretch an academic conversation far beyond where it would have gone without him. He served as a symbol for the others of a child who struggled with some things but was amazingly good at others, and the force of his personality made him a desired friend. His popularity continued after he moved to third grade, but, finding his high-level commentary less welcome in this environment, was more of a force for general naughtiness than intellectual stimulation. Each of these children had an effect on their classroom environment.

The children influenced our tutorial and small group work as well. Bella peppered me with questions and suggestions about everything we discussed in tutorial, and this pushed me to be more responsive to her demands than I might otherwise have been. In Study Circle and Book Circle, she was frequently the first to volunteer for any new task and her enthusiasm was contagious. Early on, I provided self-select reading time at the end of our sessions; my intent was to assess growth in interest by seeing how long each child would continue reading as time went on. However, it soon became evident that, no matter how detached Sam seemed to be from his classmates, he would take every opportunity to return to his classroom as early as possible. I soon restructured our lessons in response – placing self-select reading first in the line-up to see how much time he would spend at this task if he no longer saw it as the barrier between him and the classroom work he worried about missing. In our small group time, Sam set the standard for excellence when it came to Wheel of Fortune. Almost immediately, the other children witnessed his facility with this game and emulated his efforts. Ethan's primary influence on our tutorial procedure involved his passionate interest in war history. Because I could find no books on this topic at his level, I had to find a way to teach him using books that I, by and large, read aloud to him. For example, I was forced to craft a new approach to multi-syllable decoding – I read all the "easy" words to build momentum and provide rich context, and he read the "hard" words. It is highly unlikely that I would have developed this technique but for his insistence on reading books of great interest to him. In Study Circle, Ethan had two basic roles: to fascinate the other children with his wealth of knowledge on a variety of topics and to provide a sense of levity. He was forever finding amusement in many of our activities, but he never made jokes at anyone else's expense and so was well-liked by all. In both the tutorial and small group aspects of the intervention I provided – as well as within their classrooms – the children had as much of an impact on their ecology as it had on them.

Microsystems

In my adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, microsystems involve the interaction of two elements of the model. Some microsystems do not include the vulnerable reader. For example, there are clear interactions between texts and peers. However, the microsystems I will explore here in depth involve the vulnerable reader directly. They include connections with particular texts and tasks. They also include relationships with peers, family members, and school-based adults.

Vulnerable Readers and Texts

Students are generally more motivated when they have some control over the texts they read (Palmer, Codling, & Gambrell, 1994). While successful readers tend to be more open to a variety of texts, it is particularly crucial that less successful readers have access to books

that support their interests. However, for upper elementary and middle school students, there is a significant gap between the kinds of books they like and what is typically available to them. Worthy, Moorman, and Turner (1999) found that the top five choices for the sixth graders they surveyed were scary books, cartoons/comics, popular magazines, sports books, and drawing instruction books – all of which tend to be in short supply in school libraries. There is also growing evidence that many vulnerable readers prefer expository texts beginning as early as first grade (Mohr, 2006) despite the fact that classroom libraries tend to include more narrative titles (Duke, 2000). I suspect this may have something to do with the fact that, while narratives written at lower reading levels can be "baby-ish" in appearance, relatively easy engaging informational texts with bright and sophisticated photographs are readily available; these books allow less successful readers to "save face" by selecting books that more closely resemble those read by their higher-achieving peers.

Below average readers differ also in their reasons for choosing books (Kragler, 2000). Average and above-average readers tend to be influenced by recommendations from family members and peers and generally choose books that are at their independent reading level or easier. However, challenged readers usually make decisions based on the book cover and pictures within the text, and to select books that are at their frustration level. They are also are more likely to choose "series" books – that is, books that have many sequels. These books may be more accessible to them for a number of reasons. They can avoid searching for new books that interest them, typically not an easy process for a reluctant reader. Once they get to know the characters in the first book and familiarize themselves with the author's syntax, they can begin the next without having to start from scratch – fully prepared to comprehend the elements of the plot that are new and different. As Margaret Meek (1988) notes, "The reader enjoys both the security of the familiar and the shock of novelty" (p. 14). There is some concern that readers become "trapped" in series books and are less likely to expand their reading horizons (Saltman, 1997). However, there is clear evidence that this is not the case (Ward & Young, 2007); those children who read series books express as much interest in high quality non-series books as do other readers (Greenlee, Monson, & Taylor, 1996) and move on to other books when they are ready to do so (Meek, 1988).

Bella. Initially, Bella seemed less concerned about selecting the books we read together than might be expected from the research cited above. In our first interview, she had difficulty referencing books that she had recently enjoyed, mentioning one book that was well below her level (one of the *Frog and Toad* series [Lobel, 1979-1999]) and one that was far above it (one of the *Goosebumps* series [Stine, 1992-1997). It seemed she really didn't have much of an attachment to books at all and was quite amenable to whatever texts I selected for her.

That changed in January. Suddenly she couldn't stop talking about books by Beverly Cleary that had Ramona and her sister Beezus as the main characters. This bordered on obsession and comments and questions about these books weezled their way into every little nook and cranny of our conversations. At one point, she talked me into choosing *Ramona and Her Father* as our guided reading text. The book was unsuitable; even given her level of tenacity, it was too difficult for her. This was due in part to the fact that it was a loosely connected set of stories that appeared to be – but was not – one extended plot, causing confusion for both of us. Also, set as it was in the 1970's, it described a family dynamic that

must have been very foreign to her with an out-of-work father who sat listlessly in front of the TV smoking cigarettes while Ramona plotted ways to support her family. I suspect others in Bella's class had latched on to this series as well and she was adamant about continuing to read it. No amount of pleading and cajoling on my part would change her mind.

And then in late May, Judy Moody came on the scene. Bella read each book in the series cover to cover and as fast as she could. As the school year came to a close and I casually mentioned that I'd be purchasing books for each of the children as I had at Christmas, she suggested that a Judy Moody book would be nice. By this time, a movie version of the first book had come out. I don't think Bella had seen it yet, but she talked about it longingly. During the summer, I took Bella and Sam to the public library every few weeks. At first, Bella continued to check out these books. And then one day she said, "I think I'm done with Judy Moody." She had read *Because of Winn Dixie* (diCamillo, 2000) in a classroom Literature Circle group in June and she started in on others by this author, even renewing *The Tale of Desperaux* (diCamillo, 2003) when she was unable to finish it by the due date. Bella had moved on from series books to "same author" books in what seemed to be a developmental progression.

Sam. As was true of Bella, Sam was quite open-minded about the books I selected for tutorial and was actually quite enthusiastic about nearly all of the expository texts we read together. He rated virtually all of them seven or more out of ten for how well he liked them. In terms of reading in his classroom and at home, he read one *A to Z Mystery* after another, as did many of the less successful readers in Sam's class. Even as his reading improved, he continued to read these books well into the summer.

Sam also connected to books that his teacher read aloud. Near Halloween, Katya read several selections from Alvin Schwartz's *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* and Sam was hooked. This surprised me because they didn't seem suited to his very reserved personality, but he was so engaged by these stories that I included them in our tutorial work as read alouds. Having heard most of the stories at least once by summer time, he checked out this book (and others from the series), now able to read them successfully on his own. His interest extended to other similar stories, including tales of horror from many cultures. In late spring Katya read *Sideways Stories from the Wayside School* (Sachar, 1985), the first book in the *Wayside School* series. These books about a school that had many floors with one classroom each rather than one floor with many rooms, appealed to yet another side of Sam that he hadn't previously shown to me – his wacky sense of humor. As we read the collection together, Sam sometimes began to laugh so hard that he couldn't go on and I had to take over the reading until he could contain himself and continue. I gave Sam a copy of *Sideways Arithmetic from Wayside School* (Sachar, 1989) as an end-of-the-year gift. He began reading it the moment he received it and, try as I might, I couldn't get him to stop reading long enough to join in any of our other final-day activities. In an odd way, I learned as much about Sam via his selection of books as I did in other more conventional ways of getting acquainted. Parts of his personality that remained relatively underdeveloped in a social setting found expression in his reading habits.

Ethan. Ethan's interest in war history was evident from our first interview and, more than any of the other students, it seemed that finding books on this topic was crucial to maintaining his engagement with reading. At the time we began working together, Ethan was reading at about the end of first grade level, so finding books for him to read on his own, or

even with support from me, was simply not possible. Looking back now, it might have been an option to take dictation from Ethan and use this text as reading material. He certainly had enough background knowledge on the topic to make this a real possibility. But Ethan was a compelling example of a child who reads to learn. He made it very clear to me from the beginning that he had no interest in the act of reading for its own sake. He tolerated reading for one reason and one reason only – the desire to gain information he couldn't get any other way. We read narrative picture books about the battles of Lexington and Concord and about a young drummer boy in the Civil War, and expository texts that explained in complex terms the various groups of rebels involved in the Revolutionary War. Ethan was undaunted by the level of conceptual challenge in these books and sopped up new knowledge like a sponge. At Christmas, I gave him a book of facts about the Civil War told in an amusing style and he later told me he had read it at least six times. I can only imagine how frustrating it must have been for a child with such sophisticated tastes, but weak foundational skills, to find reading material that suited him. By the time I completed his assessment in February, he was reading at about mid-third grade level and the range of texts available to him had expanded considerably. Still, they could hardly compete with the history and nature channels that had been his rich and reliable sources of information for so long.

Study Circle and Book Circle. Worthy, et al. (1999) have noted that books about animals were rated seventh in a list of sixth graders' choices and I suspect that, had they surveyed fourth graders, that topic would have been even farther up the list. Of all the many options we considered, the children chose to conduct research and write books about animals during Study Circle. Part of the appeal may have been that, within the parameters of this topic, there were so many choices available to them. Each child could list between 20 and 30 off the top of her/his head, including such exotic species as warthogs and sea urchins. Typically, they also had a certain amount of prior knowledge about these animals. To initiate our research, the children listed information they already had about their chosen animal and most offered at least four or five facts. While I hadn't considered this as we began topic selection, the ready availability of relatively easy books about animals proved a great boon. The *True Book* series (various authors) included books about nearly every animal chosen. While I required that they consult at least two books and one website in their research, this series served as fertile ground from which to begin their book-writing adventures. At times I wondered if there were so many lower-level books about animals because of children's inherent interest in them, or whether children were intrigued by animals because the available texts satisfied their natural curiosity and desire to become knowledgeable experts.

When it came time to select the core texts that we would all read during Book Circle, I made the decision to choose stories about people who had struggled to read or had other difficulties in school:

- *More Than Anything Else* by Marie Bradby (the story of Booker T. Washington's tenacious efforts to learn to read)
- *The Wednesday Surprise* by Eve Bunting (about a little girl who, much to her parents' surprise, teaches her grandmother to read)
- *Thank You, Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco (the author's autobiographical account of her struggles with literacy)

- "Slower Than the Rest," from *Every Living Thing* by Cynthia Rylant (a story of a little boy who has always been "slow," but is redeemed by bringing his pet turtle to school to illustrate the importance of Prevent Forest Fires week)

I never mentioned to the children the reasoning behind my selections. Nevertheless, they seemed to connect on a personal level with the characters with whom they shared so much in common. Bella commented that Booker (in *More Than Anything Else*) must have felt sad because he wanted so much to be able to read and, at first, was unsuccessful; she added that, if he went to school, he might feel afraid because he couldn't read like the other children. Sam spoke about the fact that Tricia (from *Thank You, Mr. Falker*) felt better when she lay in the grass and talked to her grandmother about her frustrations – asking her if she was smart even though she couldn't read. Later he noted that Tricia was bullied by the other children, an experience that he, too, had suffered. During our discussion, Bella asked the group how they thought Tricia would feel if she continued to struggle with reading after moving to a new school; after listening to others' ideas, she asserted that Tricia would feel embarrassed and "different" because she was behind everyone else. Sam suggested that Tricia didn't ask the teacher to help her learn to read because "maybe some other students will know" that she struggled. When we talked about the importance of Charlie the turtle to Leo's well-being ("Slower Than the Rest"), Sam insisted that it was not the fact that Charlie was a turtle, but rather that he was an animal that Leo had saved (by picking him up off the road) that was important. Bella confirmed Charlie's impact by noting that Leo got "faster" after bringing Charlie to school because he was now confident enough to help himself and accept help from others. These comments remind me of Meek's (1988) assertion that "texts reveal what we think we have successfully concealed even from ourselves" (p. 35). It is difficult for me to imagine that Bella, Sam, and Ethan (although he had moved away by the time we had these discussions) had not experienced many of the same emotions they attributed to the characters in these texts. It is possible that, in talking about characters with whom they shared a fundamental experience, they were able to process vicariously feelings that had remained largely under the surface until then.

Basal reading programs, with their assortment of literature excerpts and bland, publisher-crafted stories (most of which are too difficult for all but a handful of students), seem to ignore the power of text to influence reading progress. In contrast, many of those who advocate for guided reading have unwittingly emphasized the significance of text difficulty over content. The children in this study connected, most importantly, with texts that met some internal need – to amuse, to provide information, to engage with a rich emotional life.

Vulnerable Readers and Tasks

The literacy tasks that students encounter at school can have wide-ranging consequences. Kaakinen & Hyona (2010) discovered that the requirements of a task could have a physiological effect. Readers' eye movements varied depending on whether they were reading to understand or to proofread. Given constraints of the task, the body reacted in ways that facilitated its completion. Different tasks have different cognitive impacts as well. Classifying tasks as memory-based, procedural, comprehension-focused, and opinion-generating, Doyle (1983) found that "tasks influence learners by directing their attention to particular aspects of content and by specifying ways of processing information" (p. 161) and

that learners use problem-solving strategies related to the parameters of the task. This is significant because the structure and content of literacy-related tasks vary greatly from classroom to classroom. In a study comparing what they termed *skills-based* and *literature-based* approaches to instruction in second and sixth grade, Fisher &Hiebert (1990) found significant differences. The skills-based program consisted of teacher-directed small- and large-group instruction, reading from the assigned textbook, and completing worksheets and other skills assignments. The literature-based classroom followed a Reading and Writing Workshop model. The authors found that students in the literature-based program spent 40 minutes per day more in literacy-related activities (primarily writing) and that the tasks with which they were engaged were longer and more complex. Most certainly these instructional differences result in varied experiences and a range of learner outcomes. In an effort to determine the effect of various tasks in the affective realm, Turner & Paris (1995) asked how literacy tasks influenced children's motivation. They found that the most motivating tasks were those which shared the following characteristics:

- Students used reading and writing for authentic purposes;
- Communication and enjoyment were emphasized;
- Students were actively involved in the construction of meaning;
- Students were in control of the process and product;
- There were many possible answers and procedures; and
- Students were able to set a goal, select and organize information, choose a strategy, and assess *the outcome*

Goal-setting. Within the context of my study, the one task that was fully embraced by all students was goal-setting. This may be because, in all the time I spent observing in their classrooms, I never once saw students offered a choice of task; they had absolutely no influence over the ways in which their school days were structured. While we negotiated goal topics based on our (sometimes differing) opinions about what the students' reading strengths and challenges were, they were fundamentally in control of the process. They generally ceded to me responsibility for planning what activities we might complete in an effort to reach the goal, but they always determined the specific goal itself (e.g., how many predictions would constitute "mastery") and estimated how long it would take to reach the goal. I decided that I would give them a certificate upon completion, but they chose whether to receive that certificate during tutorial or in front of their peers at Study or Book Circle time. In some ways, I believe, this goal-setting process had as much or more impact on their achievement as the content of the goal itself. Ethan, in particular, came to see himself as a person who made plans and carried them out; he even began to view life as a whole in goal-setting terms, referring to book-making as a "goal," even though I'd never used that word to describe the process.

While goal-setting was important for all the students, each had other particular tasks that they found to be engaging or frustrating. The tasks assigned, negotiated, or chosen in the tutorial and small group settings varied in the extent to which they conformed to Turner & Paris's (1995) recommendations. Tasks that were engaging for one student were less so for others.

Decoding tasks. The children participated in four basic decoding tasks. We began each Study Circle/Book Circle session by playing Wheel of Fortune. This game required both letter-

sound knowledge and the ability to use context clues to decode a message. Since these were areas of strength for Sam, he excelled at and delighted in this task, frequently guessing words with only minimal letter clues. While Ethan also enjoyed the game, he was not so adept. His guesses generally made sense in context, but often ignored or miscalculated the letters that had already been guessed (e.g., guessing *then* from tha _).

Students for whom decoding was a major or at least significant issue (Ethan and Bella) also worked on decoding tasks in the tutorial setting. One such task was Making Words/Making Big Words. The students used letter tiles to build words of increasing length and difficulty. This came quite easily for Bella, but Ethan was erratic in his performance. There would be days when he was quite successful at shifting letters and letter sounds to form related words (e.g., "Beginning with *mist*, change one letter to form *mast"*), but, on other days and with longer words or more sophisticated permutations (e.g., "Beginning with *teach*, rearrange the same letters to form *cheat*"), he became quite confused and frustrated. It seemed that this often had more to do with his health than anything else since he struggled inordinately on days when he didn't feel well.

For a second task, I chose a very challenging book on a topic of interest to them – war history for Ethan and weather for Bella. I read aloud most of the book, but whenever I got to a multi-syllable word, I would stop and ask them to figure it out. This task was effective for both children. I was able to provide a certain amount of momentum and, with their strengths in use of context clues and growing skill at structural analysis, they were able to figure out most of the words.

At Bella's urging, I made a list of some of the most challenging words from her weather book and timed her as she read them aloud. Then she set a goal for reducing the amount of time it would take her to read the list. Hearing about the choice Bella had made, Ethan, too, signed on for this task. Their reactions to the activity were dramatically different, however. The press of time was a source of frustration for Ethan. He commonly made a guess based on the first few letters of the word, found his rate of progress to be unacceptable, and, ultimately, chose not to continue. Bella, on the other hand, was obsessed by reducing her speed. After she had met and exceeded her goal, it seemed to me that additional work on this task was of little use. Bella did not agree. She asked to read the list over and over until she was reading the words at a rate of about one word per second. She proudly showed her goal certificate to her family and was delighted to learn that her older brother was unfamiliar with one of the words on the list. Bella and Ethan were very different personalities and this may account for some of the variance in their response to these tasks. However, it also seems that children who are weak but not debilitated by a particular reading skill may respond best to high levels of challenge, while those for whom that skill is a foundational problem require more scaffolding and less pressure in order to progress.

Of the four tasks, the two that were most universally successful – Wheel of Fortune and the shared read aloud – also conformed most closely to Turner & Paris's (1995) criteria for motivational tasks. Wheel of Fortune was all about communication (of a message about what we planned to do that day) and the active construction of meaning. Students had control of the process if not the product (they could choose to guess letters or words) and there was a clear

goal. The shared read aloud was an authentic reading task and also required ongoing attention to meaning.

Vocabulary. Of the three children, only Bella had significant issues with vocabulary. She was, in general, quite self-aware, and chose to focus on expanding her vocabulary as her first goal. Bella asked that, as we read nonfiction texts, I write unfamiliar words on word cards so that she could take them home to practice. While I was uncertain of the efficacy of this approach, I willingly complied. Each day, I would ask her to explain the words but she was rarely able to do so. Bella had a tendency to tell me what she thought I wanted to hear and she insisted that she had been practicing them at home, but I suspect this was, in fact, not the case. On more than one occasion, Bella balked at the idea of a completing a task at home for which she had demonstrated enthusiasm at school (e.g., the illustrations for her book); she may have had enough required homework that adding an additional task was just too much.

It was at this time that I introduced strategies for dealing with unknown words and this proved much more effective. While she often forgot the meanings of words from day to day, she could regularly employ the word-level strategies she had learned to deal with unknown words in context. In the end, this seemed a more significant and useful accomplishment. It also conformed more closely than did the word card approach to Turner & Paris's (1995) criteria for motivation – authentic, focused on the active construction of meaning, process under the reader's control, and a range of possible answers.

Self-monitoring. Of all the comprehension strategies I taught the students, results from self-monitoring and employing "fix-ups" proved most interesting. From the get go, Bella had been sensitive to any barrier to understanding. The following exchange occurred during our first tutorial session:

> Bella: (reading aloud) *The pandas were given to zoos* – it doesn't make sense.
>
> Elizabeth: Try reading to the end of the sentence.
>
> Bella: (reading aloud) *The pandas were given to zoos as an act of friendship by the government of China* – I still don't get it that much.

Because Bella was more than willing to admit that she was confused, the idea of self-monitoring came naturally to her. Bella had one fix-up strategy that she employed with regularity and that was re-reading. While it served her quite well, she would have benefitted from a more flexible approach to difficulty. I encouraged her to read ahead in hopes of finding clarifying information farther along in the sentence or paragraph and she complied when reminded, but she was never really comfortable with this approach. In some ways, her commitment to meaning-making seemed to constrain her; she was unwilling to move on unless she fully understood what had come before.

Since comprehension, even at the low-inference level, was Sam's primary issue, strategy instruction was the foundation of all our work together. He became quite expert at making and confirming predictions and had some success with noting connections to story characters, but Sam struggled with the idea of admitting that he did not understand what he'd read. Time and time again he would insist that he had understood but, when pressed, could show no evidence of this. After a while I came to understand that there was simply no pay-off, in Sam's eyes, for admitting difficulty. He preferred not to draw attention to himself and such an admission would put him in the spotlight. At that point, I devised a procedure to short-circuit this kind of

thinking. I made a graph and we colored in a square every time he was able to explain what he'd read AND every time he told me he did not understand and could explain the source of the difficulty (a word problem or an idea problem). This seemed to reposition inadequacy as success and affected his willingness to confront a lack of comprehension in a significant way.

Ethan had the same reaction to the idea of self-monitoring, but for the opposite reason. While he struggled with decoding and fluency, comprehension at all levels had always been his strength. Like Sam, he saw no advantage to admitting a lack of understanding. This would, in fact, undermine his reading identity. Ethan was able to note words and ideas that didn't make sense to him when they were presented in isolation (e.g., The man wore a goatee –or – The old man was eight years old). He had more difficulty, however, when he read extended segments of text, resisting my efforts to get him to note areas of misunderstanding. By the time we wrapped up our work on this strategy, Ethan, too, had begun to acknowledge that he did not fully understand everything he read, especially in expository text that included a great deal of academic vocabulary. I wouldn't say that my insistence on self-monitoring was ever a popular activity for Sam or Ethan (and it fulfilled few of the motivational criteria noted above), but, over time, they were more able to recognize their own confusion and employ fix-up strategies to deal with it.

Research and composition. All of the students in Study Circle embarked on the book-writing process with considerable enthusiasm. They chose the topic they would write about and had a clear goal of producing a book on that topic. What information they'd include and what the final product would look like were also very much under their control. They participated in the active construction of meaning by selecting what notes to take from each source they consulted and integrating those notes to form a coherent text. Since we planned for them to share their books with their classmates, genuine communication was also a motivating factor for Bella and Ethan in particular.

Despite her initial enthusiasm, Bella was quite daunted by the task at hand. She did not easily conceptualize the note-taking process – a problem that was exacerbated by two absences during this key time. We took some time in tutorial to jumpstart her note-taking; she read from the sources and told me what to write down in her notebook. Later, she struggled to combine her notes to produce a draft. If she didn't understand words I had used during the note-taking process, she attempted to include the offending vocabulary anyway; the result was the insertion of a number of sentences that simply didn't make sense. Because of her frequent absences, Bella seemed to feel constantly under pressure to catch up with the rest of the children and I suspect this made it even more difficult to think critically about what she was doing; the temptation to get any old words down on paper was just too great. In third grade, she had been taught a formulaic approach to writing including signal words such as *first*, *then*, and *next*, and she used these words as she wrote in an unfamiliar genre which did not require such terms. For example, she wrote that coyotes "silently appear and disappear. *Then* coyotes, jackals, wolves and dogs [are] related." It was difficult for me to understand her draft and it took me longer than it should have to figure out that she was extrapolating a strategy that was inappropriate to this context. On the last day of Study Circle, all of the other students had completed books and were ready to read aloud to the group. Bella was quite disheartened at

having to wait another week and attempted (unsuccessfully) to read her unfinished book. Nevertheless, she later went on to read her book in her classroom with great success.

Sam employed the same strategy for book-writing that he used for most assignments – he listened carefully to my instructions, sat alone, put his head down, and applied himself consistently and diligently to the task at hand. He had no trouble with any of the sub-tasks: taking notes, combining the individual bits of information to construct a draft, revising and proofreading as needed, or drawing illustrations for the finished book. His was the first book to be completed – much to the surprise and consternation of some of the other students. I sometimes wondered how engaged Sam was with his topic of choice (wolves), however. He never talked spontaneously about knowledge he'd gained and, when he was required to share some of the information with his classmates (e.g., that wolves could run for 50 miles without resting), they seemed more intrigued than he did. Nevertheless, Sam had a reserved reaction to nearly everything and this may have reflected his personality more than anything else.

As one might expect, Ethan viewed the book-writing project more as a way to gain more information on a topic of interest (sharks) and demonstrate his competence than as a literary endeavor. For this reason, he seemed to enjoy the note-taking part of the process more than any other aspect and regularly brought us up to speed on his growing knowledge base ("Sharks eat tin cans!"). That said, he never objected to the drafting itself, despite the fact that he had previously expressed dislike for writing. He had envisioned that his book would have an illustration on nearly every page and some of his drawings were deeply imaginative, but he became somewhat overwhelmed by this task as our work time drew to a close. Each student had more and less preferred aspects of the book production process but the task as a whole was compelling for everyone.

Discussion. More than any other task we undertook, preparing for and engaging in discussions of shared texts incorporated all of Turner & Paris's (1995) motivational elements. Book Circle time very much resembled adult book groups since it emphasized authentic communication about aspects of the text that were most engaging to the participants. By discussing questions that they themselves had generated – questions which, by intent, encouraged a variety of responses – the children built a shared understanding of a textual experience. Since they were responsible for passing the Talking Rock to the next speaker, they controlled the process as well as the content. And after reflecting on their initial experience of our discussion, each child set a personal goal for improvement.

Bella and Sam (Ethan had moved away by this point) had differing responses to the discussion process. Bella initially struggled with the idea of writing questions for discussion. Rather than composing a question and then generating several potential answers as I had assigned, she wrote multiple questions. By our final discussion, however, she asked "Do you think Leo really got "faster"? and then produced seven affirmative responses and three negative responses, each with a supporting reason. As might be expected, Bella loved the actual discussion itself. She regularly volunteered to ask the first question and her only frustration came when she had something to say and another child was given the Talking Rock instead. Bella was very aware of the extent to which the group did and did not follow the discussion protocol and, as we conducted our first self-evaluation, was able to offer examples of things we'd done well (e.g., no side conversations) and things we needed to work on (e.g.,

maintaining focus when noises in the environment were distracting). Unfortunately, this broad awareness seemed to get in the way of selecting a personal goal on which to focus. At first she chose speaking clearly as her goal; before she'd made any real progress in this regard though, she changed her goal to listening carefully and not repeating what others had said. Both of these were areas of challenge for Bella, but her inability (or reluctance) to choose a specific focus was problematic for her.

Sam exhibited a nearly opposite discussion profile. He was, from the first, a competent question-writer. He asked such questions as "Why do you think the man read a newspaper to the crowd?" (*More Than Anything Else*) and "How do you think the turtle got in [sic] the highway?" ("Slower Than the Rest"), providing the required three possible answers for each question (and no more). He spoke very little in discussion, but the comments he made were thoughtful, suggesting, for example, that the literate man in *More Than Anything Else* felt a special obligation to help Booker learn to read since he was the only one in the town capable of doing so. Sam was regularly teased by his classmates for not speaking loudly enough for them to hear so it was no surprise to me that he chose talking louder as his goal. Our Book Circle contingent was a much smaller and more intimate group and we never had trouble hearing Sam, but he stuck with this goal throughout our discussions.

All of the students with whom I worked had their more- and less-preferred tasks. Bella enjoyed most those activities that allowed her to demonstrate some tangible growth (e.g., greater speed in reading her list of multi-syllable weather-related words) and/or to express her ideas to her peers (e.g., discussion). Sam was most engaged by tasks that involved a clear and manageable process – Wheel of Fortune, taking notes, and question-writing. Ethan, as might be predicted from his preference for public recognition over personal development, was less enamored of tasks themselves and more concerned with task outcomes – would he know something at the end of the task that he had not known before and would he be acknowledged for knowing it? In contrast to tasks typically assigned to "remedial" students (drills, worksheets, etc.), these children shared a desire to participate in activities over which they could exert some amount of control and which engaged their considerable intellect (Turner & Paris, 1995).

Vulnerable Readers and Peers

Friendships – and connections to texts read by friends – is a fundamental part of literacy for successful readers (Guthrie, et al., 2000; Strommen & Mates, 2004). As Pellegrini & Galda (1996) note, these connections form as early as kindergarten and result in cognitively complex interactions that both stimulate thought and support relationships. Smith (2004) found that competent male readers from the age of five to seven years gained purchase with their peers due to the wealth of knowledge they gained from reading non-fiction books on topics such as football and dinosaurs. Similar bonds continue at least through middle school (Graff, 2010).

For less successful readers, however, the connection between texts and friends is tenuous at best. As noted earlier, while strong readers most often select reading material based on suggestions from peers and family members, weaker readers rarely look to others for book recommendations (Kragler, 2000). In addition, classroom interactions frequently marginalize vulnerable readers. Matthews & Kesner (2000) observed a challenged first grade child as he participated in literacy activities. They found that his peers often simply ignored his

efforts and, when they did attend to him, they provided unsolicited assistance, criticized his attempts, and even erased his contributions to a group project. In a fifth grade Literature Circle discussion, gender proved to be the determining factor among a group of less-able readers (Clarke, 2006). Girls in the group grabbed the notebook of the boy assigned to lead the discussion and spoke for him rather than allowing him to participate. Hall (2007) and McDermott (1993) found that vulnerable readers were unable to do what was necessary to comprehend texts (e.g., ask questions, request support on assignments) and still maintain their identities as proficient readers and avoid unfavorable judgments by their peers.

Being an independent child, it was not surprising to me that Bella did not frequently speak of her friends' reading habits. Her *Ramona* obsession was initiated by conversations with other girls about what they were reading, and her shift to *Judy Moody* books may have been as well, but she was more inclined to look to her teacher as a source of book suggestions. Bella enjoyed guided reading time in her classroom so long as Libby was present, but complained to me that, when her group met without her teacher, they refused to respond to the questions she asked in an effort to clear up her confusion. This group was made up of the weaker readers in the classroom and, while they may have shared Bella's reading level, they did not share her determination to construct meaning from text, and this was a source of great frustration for her. By the end of the school year, Bella's best friend was a girl as serious about school as she was and it seems likely that books and reading were a regular part of their conversation.

When I read descriptions of the first grade vulnerable reader and of the 5th grade Literature Circle group mentioned above, I was struck by their similarity to an observation I conducted in Sam's classroom. Like the younger child, Sam was marginalized by his peers and like the boys in the Literature Circle group, the perpetrators were girls. On this particular day in late September, Sam was assigned to work with three girls to produce a poster of main ideas and details from a recently-read selection. It took three reminders before Sam joined the group and he sat as far away from the girls as he could get away with without attracting the teacher's attention. He did not participate until Katya asked him specifically to contribute a main idea and, later, a detail. While the girls argued about the shape of the graphic organizer, Sam played with a marker and watched. When he attempted to engage with the group by drawing a line on the poster (a line that seemed appropriate), the girls shouted, "No!" and he stopped until they told him specifically where to draw the line and what marker to use. From this point on, Sam made no further attempts to add to the poster without instruction from the girls; this went on for more than ten minutes. Finally, one of the girls said, "We want Sam to draw." He replied incredulously, "Draw?" but before he could respond fully, Katya announced that it was time to clean up. On another occasion, several of Sam's peers mocked him for the way he positioned his body while standing at the white board in front of the classroom. His attempts to converse with other students about classroom content were frequently rebuffed. It was no surprise to me that Sam, like Bella, was more likely to look to his teacher rather than his peers for support for his literacy as well as her input on book choices.

Of the three students I've described, Ethan was clearly the most peer-oriented. He was very popular with both the third and fourth graders and had a particularly strong relationship with Paul, a boy who attended Study/Book Circle, but was not an official participant in the study. I had originally intended to work with Paul in tutorial as well. His reading was very

inaccurate, but by October he was reading Harry Potter books one after the other and I soon came to understand that his miscues were a matter of carelessness only and didn't interfere with his understanding at all. Paul was Ethan's intellectual equal and found his knowledge of science and history stimulating. Unfortunately for both of them, there was some four years difference in their reading levels at the beginning of this study and this precluded the kind of book idea exchange that might have occurred were they a better match in terms of achievement. Children whose reading more closely matched Ethan's did not share his academic interests. As gregarious as he was in all other respects, as a reader, Ethan was a loner.

By February, Ethan was reading close to grade level but, since he'd moved away by then, I can only guess about the book-based connections he may have formed in his new classroom community. Sam was fully able to engage with peers around reading, but Katya confided that, unlike the previous year, her class was not one to latch on to particular books or series of books and pass them around. Had he been a year older, Sam, too, might have been part of the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Kinney, 2007-2011) craze. Of the three children, Bella had the best prospects for becoming a social reader; her classmates were on fire about books, particularly after their experience with Literature Circles, and her best friend was likely to support her new-found interest in books by Kate diCamillo and other authors who spoke to the deep experience of children her age.

Vulnerable Readers and Family Members

Evidence for the importance of family reading habits in the encouragement of literacy in emergent readers is indisputable (Baker & Scher, 2002; Rashid, Morris, & Sevcik, 2005; Senechal & Young, 2008). In addition, as Klauda (2009) asserts, the "impact of social experiences and perspectives [on reading] is cumulative and ongoing" (p. 331); since familial relationships are typically the most "cumulative and ongoing" in a child's life, this research suggests that parent and sibling reading attitudes and behaviors are highly significant even for elementary and secondary level students. In fact, through middle school, parental impact is as high or higher than that of peers, especially with respect to reading frequency (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1995). The number of books found in the home has also been shown to be an important factor (Halle, Kutz-Costes, & Mahoney, 1997; Klauda, 2009) as has the availability of a variety of reading materials (Strommen & Mates, 2004), the number of years spent reading aloud to children, and visits to the library (Shapiro & Whitney, 1997). In a complex study attempting to understand the relationship between family literacy factors and reading comprehension, Katzir, Lesaux, & Kim (2009) determined that a positive environment (defined by the amount of reading done by adults in the home as well as the factors noted above) had no direct effect on student achievement; however, it did demonstrate an indirect effect: it increased children's self-concept as readers which, in turn, affected comprehension of text.

I know far less about the role of the children's families relative to their literacy interests and behaviors than any other factor in the ecology. There was, however, at least one person who enjoyed reading within each household. Bella's mother, who said she had loved to read as a child, now read work-related magazines and discussed them with her boss. Her older sister had dropped out of high school but had now returned, with dual enrollment in both an alternative secondary school and a community college, so it is likely that she had textbooks at

home. Her older brother was a successful high school student who was known as the reader in the family, making frequent trips to the library and consuming long books in short periods of time. Sam's father spoke of reading newspaper articles and sharing what he had learned from them with his wife and Sam insisted that his older brother was the best reader he knew. Ethan's mother stated flatly that she found reading to be "boring," but even she was caught up in the *Twilight Saga* (Meyer, 2008-2011) series that her daughters read with enthusiasm.

Each family reacted with a combination of pleasure and surprise to their child's progress. Sam's father was very pleased at his newfound ability to understand what he read. Despite her own history of reading, Bella's mother seemed quite taken aback by Bella's new-found interest, including her refusal to come to the dinner table until she'd finished a chapter. Whereas she had regularly engaged with Bella when reading was more difficult for her, her mother seemed to feel less needed as her reading improved and simply witnessed from afar. She talked about fabricating a little, quiet library space for Bella but, to my knowledge, this never occurred. Ethan's mother, distracted as she was by economic adversity as well as a certain amount of family disarray, was no more aware of Ethan's improvement in reading than she had been of his tremendous capacity for comprehension despite his decoding struggles; and yet she, too, was delighted by the results of my final assessment. In all these cases, it seemed that the families, much as they would have liked to cultivate their children's literacy, were not quite sure how to go about doing so and had enough other life challenges that this issue was well-down the list given the many demands on their time, energy, and economic resources.

Vulnerable Readers and School-based Adults

Noddings (2003) asserts that there are three characteristics of school-based adults (teachers, tutors, coaches, etc.) that promote learning: positive intent, reasonableness of technique, and facilitative manner. I would argue that these characteristics are as applicable in the realm of literacy as in any other. A successful reading teacher must approach instruction with the intent to help all students attain a high level of literacy, must employ instructional strategies that are likely to produce that result, and must interact with children in ways that do not interfere with their natural capacity to learn. This is particularly true for teachers of vulnerable readers (Ostroskey, Gaffney, & Thomas, 2006). In his classic text *On Education*, Leo Tolstoy (1967) illuminates an approach to literacy that conforms to these criteria. He states:

> The best teacher will be he who has at his tongue's end the explanation of what it is bothering the pupil. The explanations give the teacher . . . the conviction that all methods are one-sided, and that the best method would be the one which would answer best to all the possible difficulties incurred by a pupil. (1967, p. 58)

Because I will describe at length in the next chapter the working relationship I established with each of the children, I will focus here on connections with their classroom teachers.

At the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year, both Bella and Ethan were students in Libby's class. Libby reveled in the study of children's literature and provided a literacy environment that piqued her students' interest in books. She read aloud with expression and planned carefully for guided reading groups. In the spring she joined me in experimenting with Literature Circles. More than any of the other classrooms, Libby's was defined by productive silence during reading time. On more than one occasion I entered the room to see not one

head lift up from a book; such was the level of engagement to be found under Libby's care. This was also an environment that promoted both risk-taking and critical/creative thought. Students knew that they could offer tentative understandings and speak their truth without fear of failure or mockery by peers. Despite a certain aloofness, Bella formed a bond with Libby. Struggling as she often did to understand key concepts, Bella viewed her teacher as a source of necessary assistance. She also appreciated Libby's efforts to make the Gold Rush era come alive for her students. When asked about the highlights of her summer, Bella referred without hesitation to the hike she and her best friend had taken with Libby the day after school got out, recounting the trip in detail. Bella was very attached to her family and seemed not to need a strong personal relationship with her teacher. Libby provided what Bella *did* need, an environment that served to increase her level of academic skill while also stimulating her natural curiosity.

There was a hole in Ethan's life when he was transferred to third grade. Libby agonized over the decision and her uncertainty was never fully resolved. Ethan's mother told me that he would say, "I miss Ms. S, I miss Ms. S!" She replied, "Well, you have another teacher now," failing to acknowledge the significance of his loss. Ethan never really connected to James, his new teacher. Although he was an engaging instructor, James seemed to view Ethan as one more behaviorally-challenged boy, one more distraction in his efforts to cover the required material. Over the course of my visits to this classroom, I never once heard Ethan engaged in dialogue that highlighted his great intellect. He vacillated between withdrawing into a world where digging in his desk was the top priority and emerging into the social scene, only to "get into it" with the other boys.

When Sam entered fourth grade, he had a history of low affect. As noted earlier, the teacher he'd had for both second and third grades remarked that he had never once expressed any emotion in the two years she'd known him. He continued in this way for several months, but, to some degree at least, Sam felt comfortable in Katya's classroom. She offered him a place where he could show sadness when friendships went astray and, ultimately, a place where he could even show affection toward her. When we talked about Sam's academic progress, it was clear that, as pleased as she was about this development, her primary focus was cultivating the whole child – in this case the side of Sam that could not be measured by tests of achievement.

Each child in this study formed connections with the other elements of his/her ecology. Bella's strongest bonds were with texts and family members and, to a certain degree, with school-based adults. Sam's literacy progress was defined by his engagement with particular tasks and his personal growth by his relationship with Katya. Ethan thrived in any setting in which interactions with peers played a role.

Mesosystems

While an analysis of microsystems proved to be more complex than I had expected, mesosystems – interactions between vulnerable readers and at least two other elements in their ecology – proved even more so. There are any number of mesosystems that might be investigated for this dissertation. I am choosing to focus on one of them: that which child psychologist D.W. Winnicott (1965; 1986) terms the *holding environment* (exemplified in this study by the tutorial and small group settings).

The Holding Environment

In his seminal work *The Ecology of Human Development*, Bronfenbrenner (1979) refers to what he terms a "transforming experiment [which] systematically alters some aspect of a macrosystem" (p. 41). Rather than requiring change from the top down, however, he suggests that this alteration may occur at any level of the system. If true, this is a testament to the power of change at the micro- and mesosystem levels. For each child in this study, distal factors played a role,[15] but, for academic growth to occur, adjustments were required in the proximal environment as well. The ultimate goal of this shift was toward what Winnicott (1965; 1986) calls the "holding environment."

Winnicott was not an educator per se, but rather a child psychologist. He argued that a child's psychological development was supported by the primary caregiver's ability to "hold" the infant. This was true in the physical sense of cuddling and rocking, but also the metaphorical sense of providing emotional support. The goal of the holding environment is not to produce some mythic "perfect" child, but to allow that child to develop as an individual "in his own right" (Winnicott, 1965, p. 44). If this process proceeds successfully, the child attains his own personal potential. Ultimately, he can take on the responsibility of maintaining and enriching this environment and to extend the holding relationship to others (Reinstein, 2006).

There are, of course, situations in which the environment is inadequate, where profound "holding" does not occur. Winnicott (1965) argues that such a failure "brings to the infant a sensation of infinite falling" (p. 113); that is, (s)he cannot trust that the caregiver will provide a safe space and feels adrift and abandoned. Winnicott goes on to suggest that, in response to this absence, the infant's "best defense is the organization of a false self" (p. 47). If the child cannot experience love in response to her true self, she must construct an identity that is more likely to engender that love.

Winnicott (1986) believed that it was sometimes possible for a therapist to compensate for inadequacies in the home environment by "holding" the clinical space. By analogy, I would argue that, when the child's challenges are academic instead of (or as well as) psychological, a school-based adult can play this role. In fact, there is substantive evidence that a child's sense of security with teachers predicts positive motivational and academic outcomes (Ostroskey, et al., 2006; Ryan, Stiller, & Lynch, 1994; Wentzel, 1997).

There are particular ways of structuring the learning ecology to create something like Winnicott's holding environment. First is the application of the gradual release of responsibility model of instruction in which the teacher begins by modeling and, over time, helps students to take on more and more of the work until, ultimately, they can function independently (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Winnicott himself speaks of what he calls "levels of dependence" (1965, p. 46). These levels range from *absolute* (in which the child has no awareness, much less control) to *relative* (in which there is awareness, but not control) to *towards independence*. In this latter stage, the child develops ways of doing without the adult guide; this is a result of the increasing self-confidence that comes from stockpiling memories of supported success. Second, the teacher "mirrors," or validates, the child's experience (Grolnick, 1990). For example, as he witnesses the child's strategy use while reading, the teacher names what is happening, allowing

[15] These factors – particularly poverty, race, and the concept of "disability" – will be discussed later in the chapter.

the child to be cognizant of his own progress and to gain confidence as a learner. Another key attribute of an academic holding environment is the provision for trust, play, and trial and error. A setting in which both stability and levity are the norm allows the child to take risks without fear of failure. As Grolnick (1990) notes:

> To take a creative leap, or even a little skip off the beaten track, one must feel that the base of operation is a stable one . . . The child must be able to try and err, to feel that the errors will be appreciated as much as the successes. (p. 33)

Finally, as is true of Winnicott's infants, no two school-age children are alike. For this reason, the holding environment must be responsive to differences among students (Winnicott, 1965). It must adjust to meet the academic and personal needs and desires of individual children – as well as instructional topics and situations – if it is to effectively support their growth and development (Noddings, 2003).

What type of adult is able to establish such an environment? First and foremost is a keen awareness of what is going on at any given moment in time within the "complex psychological field" (Winnicott, 1965, p. 44) of the learning space. This is not a matter of developing perfect lessons and never deviating from them; it is about crafting a possible plan, but remaining carefully tuned to the child's response and adjusting the plan as needed (Noddings, 2003); it may be, in fact, that the teacher adjusts her understanding of the task at hand in the process of interacting with the child (Goldstein, 1999). In addition, the teacher must be able and willing to take the child's perspective (Ostroskey, et al., 2006) and to identify with the child on a deep level – to search within for some shared experience that allows for the development of a foundational bond. If the child is struggling with a strategy or concept, it is important for the teacher to conjure up some remembrance of her own difficulty in order to fully understand and empathize with the emotional as well as academic aspects of the child's current situation. It is likely that he is feeling a great deal of anxiety about his ability to overcome adversity and, if the teacher can connect to that emotion, she is better able to support the student (Winnicott, 1965).

When this approach is successful, the result is a relationship characterized by what Noddings (1988) terms an "ethic of care." Whether the teacher is interacting with one child at a time (as in a tutorial setting) or with a group of children, the built relationships are, essentially, dyadic. According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), these dyads shift from one- to two-sided in nature. This process begins with *observational dyads* in which "one member is paying close and sustained attention to the activity of the other, who, in turn, at least acknowledges the interest being shown" and moves to *joint activity dyads* in which "the two participants perceive themselves as doing something together" (pp. 56-57). As participants engage in dyadic interactions, they develop an emotional bond, a bond that it is the adult's responsibility to cultivate but demands something of the child in kind (van Manen, 1994). And the adult must not care for the child just because he is well-behaved or a good student, but because he *is.* As Bronfenbrenner (2005) insists, "In order to develop normally, a child needs the endearing, irrational involvement of one or more adults in care of and in joint activity with that child. In short, *somebody has to be crazy about that kid*" (p. 262).

The attending adult must be open to intrapersonal change as well. Within Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, all connections have the potential to be reciprocal.

In speaking of dyadic relationships, he notes that when one member of the dyad changes, the other member is likely to change as well (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). We tend to assume that it is the teacher who facilitates the development of the children in her charge, but, in being present for these children, it is impossible for the skills and persona of that teacher to remain unaltered.

Vulnerable readers and the holding environment – Its absence. There were gaps in the holding environment for each of the children with whom I worked. Some of these gaps were a function of the curriculum that had been the backbone of literacy instruction since they entered school several years earlier. While their fourth grade teachers assumed greater responsibility for planning instruction in ways that were personally and intellectually stimulating for children, in the primary grades scripted curriculum set both the objectives and the tone. I will address the many inadequacies of this curriculum in the upcoming section on exosystems. At this point, suffice it to say that the curriculum was far too difficult for most children (thereby increasing their level of anxiety) and largely unrelated to their experience; it provided modeling and independent practice but no scaffolded instruction in between; and, because of the demands for teachers to stick to the pacing guide, there was no room for play or trial and error.

Other gaps were relatively unique to individual children. Bella had a strong emotional base at home and, while not exactly a social butterfly, also had solid peer relationships. In previous years, however, she had not formed strong connections with her teachers. While kindergarten and first grade had gone quite well, her third grade teacher seemed more cognizant of her inadequacies than her strengths. She began to feel unsuccessful as a student and brought this self-concept (as well as a tentativeness rooted in it) to her fourth grade experience. It took most of the year for her to revise her self-image.

It is to Ethan that Bronfenbrenner's concept of "infinite falling" best applies. For a variety of reasons (primarily economic), Ethan moved frequently, so his academic progress was regularly interrupted. Retained in first grade, he was placed in a second/third grade combination class. His mother told me that he was offered no literacy support services; evidently retention was considered to be the intervention. Since he was not an independent worker, placement in a split class was probably not ideal for Ethan and, by the time he arrived at my research site, his mother simply allowed the school to assign him to fourth grade based on chronological age. Ethan's cumulative file arrived at the end of October and he was transferred to third grade a couple weeks later. This was very upsetting to Ethan; by then he had established friendships and a strong relationship with his teacher. Unlike the other two children, Ethan became frustrated when I asked him to work on decoding tasks that were at the upper level of his ability. He vacillated from applying himself in a very serious, almost tense way to guessing wildly. I believe that he never fully trusted me to interrupt his "free fall." And then it was February and he was gone.

Sam more closely fit Bronfenbrenner's profile of "false self." Before arriving in Katya's class, he had been reluctant to express any emotion. In fact, Sam was a very emotional child. He laughed and cried many times over the course of his fourth grade year. But in second and third grade – not feeling the level of support and stability he needed – he kept this side of himself under wraps, projecting a placid demeanor. While Sam's father exhibited a certain warmth and energy in his interactions with me, I wondered what place affect assumed in their

home. I saw his brother a couple of times when I picked him up to go to the public library and he never spoke a word to me. I saw no evidence that Sam exhibited a playful approach to his work. He seemed to like math because it was systematic and if you attended closely to directions and applied yourself, you could get the answers right. Sam spoke of being lonely and once referred to himself as "the only Asian friend," despite the fact that there were other Asian children (although no Chinese-Americans) in his classroom. On some level, they couldn't relate to him, nor he to them.

Vulnerable readers and the holding environment – Its presence. Both Libby and Katya provided a stronger holding environment than Bella, Sam, and most probably Ethan's previous teachers. Bella and Ethan were very fond of Libby. She established a strong classroom community early on and this environment was very supportive of her students, particularly those who struggled with academics or behavior or both. All children could take risks without fear of snide remarks or eye-rolling from their peers. Libby saw her students as individuals and was as aware of their strengths as she was of their challenges. She adjusted her teaching to meet each student's needs. Katya's classroom was a holding environment for Sam. When I spoke with her about Sam's academic progress, she frequently said very little. Given a classroom full of children, many of whom had emotional and behavioral problems, she had to pick her battles; in the end, I came to believe that her focus on the affective world of the children she served was a reasonable, if not ideal, choice. The situation was cathartic for Sam. In the fall, he lost the spelling bee and showed no emotion. By winter, he occasionally cried when he was teased on the playground – sad, of course, but seemingly a needed release – and in the spring began hugging Katya when he entered the classroom in the morning. Katya went out of her way to attend to Sam as a whole, rather than just academic, being – to "hold" him so that he could begin to release that false, stoic self and move on.

In the next chapter, I will describe in detail the learning environment I established for tutorial and small group sessions. At this point, it is useful to mention the general aspects of that environment which reflected the "holding" model. First, there was great stability to our relationship. The children could rely on me to be there to see them on schedule three times each week and to let them know in advance if I were unable to do so. I did my best to address their affective as well as academic needs – inquiring as to the books and activities that interested them and adjusting plans if their energy was low or they exhibited frustration. I looked for what was good in everything they did rather than focusing primarily on their shortcomings. Second, selection of texts was, as much as possible, a collaborative process, particularly in the tutorial setting. I typically offered a choice of at least two books that were appropriate for the work at hand. The preponderance of the books we read were expository texts, since it is much easier to find engaging non-fiction texts at the first/second grade level; much of the narrative text at these earlier levels is ill-suited for the more sophisticated tastes of upper elementary students. Also, these non-fiction texts tended to be shorter than narratives and this length lent itself well to the very focused lessons I taught. We did read stories when the relevant strategy (e.g., prediction) was better suited to this genre and during Book Circle time as we focused on making connections with characters. The children also played a role in task-selection. Through goal-setting, they were able to work on aspects of reading they felt most concerned about and the emphasis was always placed on meeting their own potential

rather than some arbitrary standard set by others. I carefully employed a gradual release of responsibility model – beginning with an explanation of a given strategy, for example, modeling its use, working collaboratively, and, only when the children were fully ready, expecting them to apply it independently. Each of the children made strong academic progress as the year wore on; I suspect this was due as much to our relationship and to the ecology of our shared space as it was to the specific lessons I taught.

There are many mesosystem elements at work in the lives of vulnerable readers. If there are conflicts between parents and teachers, this can undermine a reader's development. If peers complain about reading an assigned text, the vulnerable reader may also be reluctant to do so. In this study, however, the most striking mesosystem was that of the reader/text/task/school-based adult. When the reader had some control over what (s)he read, was introduced to new tasks in a systematic way, and had a supportive relationship with the teacher, this "holding environment" was largely effective. When one or more of these elements were absent, academic and affective progress was limited.

Exosystems

In Bronfenbrenner's model, exosystems are those elements of the ecology that influence, but do not directly interact with, the child. A common example is the parental work environment; the child is not present in this environment, and yet pay schedules, policies about family leave, stress levels, and many other employment-related factors may significantly affect the child's life. While there are any number of exosystems that are connected to the vulnerable reader's literacy development, three are most important to this study: test publishers (via the testing practices of the state and school district), basal reader publishers (via adoption by the school board), and health care provisions (or lack of same) in conjunction with school attendance policies and parental work affordances/constraints.

Standardized Tests

At its best, assessment is about "noticing details of literate behavior, imagining what they mean from the child's perspective, knowing what the child knows and can do, and knowing how to arrange for that knowledge and competence to be displayed, engaged, and extended" (Johnston & Costello, 2005). This is not the objective of standardized testing, at least in this country (Rupp & Lesaux, 2006) where testing is all about accountability. There has never been a greater volume of testing nor has assessment ever been conducted with such high stakes (Johnston & Costello, 2005), nor at such cost. For example, the price tag for administering and scoring the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) in 2009 was approximately $93 million, nearly ten times that of 2000 (Dexheimer, 2009).

One would think that, given the enormity of the expenditure, standardized tests would provide educational information that is both reliable and valid. Not the case. Part of this is due to the tests themselves. Maynard & Marlaire (1992-not on card) determined, for example, that the testee's performance on a given item may be positively or negatively influenced by preceding items – usually positively if the preceding item is similar, and negatively if it is different in some significant way. Other researchers have found that these tests are not valid measures, especially for children of color and English language learners, largely due to differences in prior knowledge (Garcia, 1991; Hoffman, Assaf, & Paris, 2001). Rupp & Lesaux (2006) determined that more than half the variance of a standards-based measure was

unexplained by a battery of diagnostic assessments, and there was strong heterogeneity of profiles both among children who pass these tests and those who do not.

These problems are exacerbated by the ways in which this test data is used. Intended only to provide valid aggregate scores, standardized tests are frequently used to categorize, diagnose, and make instructional decisions for individual students (Buly & Valencia, 2002; Hoffman, et al., 2001; Rupp & Lesaux, 2006). This positions a certain percentage of children as inadequate readers and, in highlighting what they apparently cannot do rather than celebrating what they can, excludes these readers from the ranks of the literate. While no one would argue that all children are equally adept at reading and writing, standardized assessments do a woefully inadequate job of differentiating those who most need additional support from those who are simply poor test-takers. Teachers' opinions are more accurate in determining which students have potential reading problems than a standardized screening test (Charlesworth, Fleege, & Weitman, 1994) and yet "the higher stakes assessment will generally subvert the lower stakes practice" (Johnston & Costello, 2005, p. 264).

The national obsession with standardized test scores has had a dramatic impact on instruction in the following ways:

- Narrowing of the curriculum to focus on reading and math and ignoring untested subjects such as social studies and the arts (Hoffman, et al., 2001; Smith, 1991);
- Increasing the pace of instruction to the point where many students are left behind (Charlesworth, et al., 1994)
- Abandoning rich teaching practices in favor of whole-group instruction, mindless drill, and worksheets (Charlesworth, et al., 1994; Moon, Brighton, Jarvis, & Hall, 2007; Smith, 1991)
- Decreasing the amount of time spent in instruction as more and more time is taken up in test preparation and "recovery" from the testing experience (Herman & Golan, 1990; Smith, 1991)
- Focusing instructional support on "bubble kids" (those children who are very close to passing the test) rather than on those children who are truly struggling (Amrein & Berliner, 2002)

These effects are even more common in low SES schools (Moon, et al., 2007). Amrein and Berliner (2002) succinctly describe the situation: Teachers "develop curricula that match the tests, coach students on items similar to those that will be on the test, [and] use commercial materials designed specifically for test-prep purposes (often supplied by the same companies that make the tests)" (p. 40).

Students are directly, as well as indirectly, affected. They experience symptoms of illness and stress, anxiety over social comparisons, and behavior problems (Charlesworth, et al., 1994; Hoffman, et al., 2001). In addition, they are more likely to be retained in grade or, at older ages, to drop out of school (Hoffman, et al., 2001). What part of the holding environment do these tests facilitate?

Fourth graders at my research site are subjected to many standardized tests over the course of the school year. They take three district vocabulary/comprehension tests, three reading fluency tests, and the end-of-year California Standards Test (CST). There are regular language mechanics, writing, and mathematics tests as well. English language learners also

take the California English Language Development Test (CELDT) in the fall. Teachers have told me that none of these assessments provide information that is useful in guiding instruction.

Passages from the district vocabulary/reading comprehension tests have an average readability of fourth grade.[16] However, a number of the questions are problematic. In addition to the many questions designed specifically to measure vocabulary (some of which provide only weak context for determining meaning), many other questions are impossible to answer unless the child has fully mastered sophisticated academic vocabulary such as *metaphor, personification*, and *synonym*. There is an overemphasis on noting whether a given piece of information is found in one or the other of two articles. Few of the selections are likely to be of interest to the average fourth grader: a story about a rubber raft arriving unexpectedly in the mail, a legend about a man who listened to talking horses, an article about the Statue of Liberty. While none of the fourth grade teachers succumbed to this practice, at least one upper grade teacher in the school handed out assessment results in full view of other students as an "incentive" to increase scores. If vulnerable readers in this classroom suffered under the illusion that they were members of the Literacy Club, this practice certainly disabused them of that notion.

In this school, as in many others, fluency testing (words correct per minute) is given the most credence among administrators. This despite the fact that such testing predicts only 23-30% of the variance on a comprehension measure and produces many false negatives (high fluency but low comprehension) and some false positives (low fluency but high comprehension) (Valencia, et al., 2010). If the vocabulary/comprehension assessments have their weaknesses, the district fluency measure is far worse. The average readability level for these passages is sixth grade with a range from fifth to seventh. Of the six passages (two per administration), four begin with sentences that are likely to confuse the reader from the get go (e.g., "'My first memory is of the brightness of light'" or "It is amazing to think that a dinosaur might have stepped in the water you drank last night"). Since this is a measurement of speed only, it is, unfortunately, much to the child's advantage to avoid worrying about meaning and just get down to the practice of "barking at print." The teacher is directed to start the stopwatch immediately, rather than allowing the reader to build some momentum by reading a sentence or two prior to timing. The fourth grade teachers with whom I worked made every effort to convey to children that fluency is more about prosody than speed, but in the end it was the timer that defined the task – and the outcome. Of the students with whom I worked, Sam was by far the most fluent. He read at a steady pace with at least a minimal amount of expression, but even he was labeled "at risk" in this area by the end of the year.

Most of the children with whom I worked made significant gains on the California Standards Test and the grade level as a whole showed large increases. I suspect this was due to a commitment on the part of the fourth grade teachers to the idea that meaning-making was the ultimate goal of all reading activity. Yet these teachers were interrogated about their drop in fluency scores and these scores were considered supremely relevant in assessing the success of their teaching. I worry that, unless there is a dramatic increase in these scores during their fifth grade year, these students will be placed in low-track classes in middle school. These

[16] As measured by the Fry Readability Formula (Fry, 2002). This is the formula employed throughout.

tracks frequently take up two periods per day, which means that students required to attend are unable to include science or elective classes in their schedule. In a domino-like effect, this reduces their ability to select high-level classes in high school, thereby undermining their plans for further education. They join the ranks of students – predominantly poor children of color – who sit on the sidelines hoping against hope to be allowed into the game.

There was a goodly amount of preparation for the spring administration of the California Standards Test and the tests themselves were a source of frustration for students. I randomly selected four passages from the fourth grade CST release questions (California Department of Education, 2011) – two narratives and two expository texts. Readability scores for the narratives were well within grade level norms (second and fourth grade). However, the expository texts tested at fifth and eighth grade level, well into the frustration range for many if not most students. Since the scores weren't received until summer, students were not forced to revisit their scores and were likely less affected by them. The stakes at the site level, however, were high. In this large urban district, the amount of flexibility a school received was, in large part, a reflection of the strength of its CST scores. The informal policy seemed to be that as long as scores were high, the District would look the other way if a school chose to stray from the prescribed curriculum. Consequently, if a particular teacher's scores are lower than expected (s)he falls under scrutiny. As I write this, teachers are attending the dreaded "data conferences" with the principal who grills them about what they will do in the coming year to insure that there is no repeat performance.

By and large, Ethan and Sam seemed to take these tests in stride. Once Ethan was moved to third grade, they both tended to score in the *Approaching Benchmark* range on the vocabulary/ comprehension test. They received *Some Risk* or *At Risk* ratings on the fluency test but, by mid-year, neither seemed particularly troubled by this. Bella, on the other hand, took these tests very seriously. She continued to work on the questions after all the other students had finished, reading and re-reading the passages until she received an acceptable score of *Approaching Benchmark.* Of all the students with whom I worked, Timmy (the child who participated fully in the study but whose data is not a part of this dissertation) was most affected. By mid-year he managed to stay relatively calm for the fluency assessment. But no matter how often his teacher and I tried to reassure him and remind him how much he'd progressed in reading, his response to the multiple choice tests was always the same: he reacted with such distress that other students were unable to concentrate and he had to be removed to another classroom. By mid-year, despite the fact that his reading had improved significantly and he was far more successful than a number of other students, he received the lowest score in the fourth grade. We hoped that, as his confidence grew, he would be able to approach these tests with some equanimity, but this was never to be.

More than anything else, the impact of these tests seemed to be the time and energy they drew from ongoing class work. CELDT testing was a major distraction at the beginning of the school year and it seemed that every couple of weeks thereafter there was a district test that took up two or three days' worth of class time. This might have been acceptable had these tests provided helpful instructional information. Unfortunately, the 15-20 minute Informal Reading Inventory I administered to many students near the beginning of the school year was the only source of useful information the teachers received.

Scripted Curriculum

> In 1998, Margaret Meek said the following about basal readers:
>
> Compare the textual variety of children's picture books with that of reading schemes. You will see how the interactions made possible by skilled artists and writers far outweigh what can be learned from books made up by those who offer readers no excitement, no challenge, no real help. (p. 19)

One would think that nearly 25 years later, this would no longer be the case; one would be disappointed. From Shannon's (1987) indictment of "technological ideology" to Dutro's (2009) reflection on the "class-privileged assumptions" (p. 89) of mandated curricula, little has changed. Since the 2002 passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) with its emphasis on the utilization of "scientifically-based reading research" (Yell & Drasgow, 2005), scripted reading programs have become ubiquitous in classrooms across the country, particularly those that serve poor children of color. The manuals short-circuit teacher development (Valencia, Place, Martin, & Grossman, 2006), preclude attention to student needs (Shannon, 1987), exclude multiple perspectives (Dutro, 2009), privilege student obedience over engagement (Jordan, 2005), and bore children to tears (Meyer, 2002; Powell, McIntyre, & Rightmyer, 2006). In short, they take children who might otherwise form strong connections with texts and position them as vulnerable readers.

While the school in which I conducted this study avoided the more onerous of district mandates during the 2010-2011 school year, this memo to principals from an assistant superintendent is representative of the philosophy that was rampant at the time the children with whom I worked began their school careers:

> By the end of the month . . . I will expect to see consistent evidence of: 2.5 hour block of OCR [Open Court Reading] instruction in a posted agenda which includes the unit, lesson, and day of instruction. Instruction in the green section [word work] begins within 15 minutes of the start of the day and follow [sic] the appropriate sequence. No supplements used. No omissions or tweaking of the program (Consistent Evidence, 2004).

In spring of 2011, I undertook a content analysis of the fourth grade Open Court textbook. The most significant finding of this analysis was an uncomfortable juxtaposition of the culture of success promoted by the text with the inaccessibility of this text for the students who are most likely to encounter it. My first task was to develop a protocol instrument for collecting and analyzing data. I drew heavily on several content analysis studies (Croghan & Croghan, 1980; Hyona, et al., 1995; McClelland, 1961) and adopted particular value factors from a number of others (Beck, 1984; Bertram, 1984; Billman, 1977; Bohning, 1986; Busch, 1972; deCharms & Moeller, 1962; Jordan, 2005; Liu, 2010; May, 1990; and Tyson-Bernstein, 1988). I read each of the selections, revising the instrument as needed.

In the slightly more than half of cases in which the achievement ideology – defined by MacLeod (2008) as the belief that society is "open and fair and full of opportunity" (p. 3) – is relevant, 85% of the Open Court selections support it. What children see as they read these selections is, by and large, a very traditional picture of what it means to be in the world – a picture that is remarkably similar to the middle-class Protestant work ethic of centuries past (Weber, 2010). Work hard, comply, be good, don't ask for help, and you will do well. The Open

Court anthology takes the achievement ideology one step further, however. Virtually every character is a success and virtually every characterless piece describes ways of becoming successful. In nearly three quarters of the selections, success/failure are meaningful constructs and, of these, success is achieved nearly 90% of the time.

While the first set of findings demonstrates Open Court's emphasis on success, the second set questions the likelihood that readers – especially those readers in the poor, urban districts that most often adopt this program – will be successful in accessing the material. I employed the Fry Readability Formula (Fry, 2002) to assess the Open Court passages. The mean readability of the selections was sixth grade with a range from second to twelfth grade. At this rate only a very few students would be able to access the text, even with substantial teacher support. Even if readability is considered too crude a measure of text difficulty, many other factors reduce the chance that fourth graders can read, understand, learn from, and enjoy the Open Court text. These include a combination of high prior knowledge demands, esoteric vocabulary, and high information density, as well as an absence of developmental concerns of importance to this age group.

By my estimate, over 70% of the selections in the fourth grade Open Court text have high prior knowledge demands and nearly 40% include substantial numbers of very challenging academic vocabulary. Information density was measured by dividing the number of independent bits of information by the number of sentences. More than 60% of the selections had ratings of .75 or above and nearly 20% scored 1.0 or above (that is, there were at least as many facts as sentences in the text). Even average readers are excluded from full participation in lessons based on these texts because they don't have the "common knowledge" that the selections presume.

Child psychologists (e.g., Berger, 2003) suggest four major developmental concerns for children of this age group: rejection of hypocrisy, challenging of social norms, concern about injustice, and desire for competence. There are selections that explore these issues. However, nearly a third of the stories and articles from the anthology incorporate none of these developmental concerns and another 45% address only one of the four – typically the issue of competence. Less than a quarter offer examples of challenging social norms or of activities that promote social justice; a mere 13% consider issues of racial, gender, or economic disparity, or address the hypocrisy to which children of this age are so sensitive. Children may be surrounded by injustice hypocrisy, and restrictive social norms, but encounter a textbook world of none-of-the-above.

In the neoliberal Open Court world, there are always winners and losers. This textbook positions even average readers as losers by including selections which are far too difficult for students to read, by failing to address developmental concerns, and by presenting a world that is largely disconnected from their experience. The winners star in Open Court stories and the losers attempt, largely unsuccessfully, to read about them.

And, of course, the children with whom I worked were most certainly among the losers within the confines of this curriculum. Fortunately their current teachers used Open Court sparingly. However, this program had been the foundation of their literacy instruction through third grade. One and a half of those years were spent reading decodable texts with titles like "Lamb on a Limb" and "The Cab":

Dan stands.
The cab spins past Dan.
Dan snaps.
The cab scats, and Dan taps.
Dan nods.
The cab stops, and in hops Dan.

Those who were "successful" with these materials – Sam among them – believed they were strong readers, even if they could make no sense of the texts (and who could?). Those who were unsuccessful – Bella, Ethan, and others – believed they were weak readers because reading nonsense proved difficult for them. These materials may well have inculcated a literacy self-concept that failed to serve these children down the line.

The Health Care Crisis

Lack of affordable health care plays a major role in the achievement gap between poor children and their more affluent peers. As of 2007, one in nine children remained uninsured (one in eight African-Americans and one in five Latinos) despite the fact that nearly 90% came from families with at least one parent in the work force (Families USA, 2008). Given the current economic downturn, these figures are most certainly an underestimate. Uninsured children are ten times more likely to have unmet health needs such as diabetes or untreated asthma. They are five times more likely to go for two or more years without a doctor visit (Children's Defense Fund, 2011).

As noted earlier, 10% of children in the early elementary grades are chronically absent from school (Chang & Romero, 2008). Without access to medical care, they have few options other than to stay home and wait it out. But often this, too, is not a real possibility. Many parents work for hourly wages and missing a day's work may mean no food on the table that night. They may have no choice but to return to work after a day home with a sick child and, unless children are old enough to care for themselves at home – a frightening thought in the neighborhoods in which poor children live – they often come back to school long before they are ready. While schools certainly recognize the impact of poor attendance, they are less cognizant of how little children are able to absorb when they come to school still suffering from colds, flu, ear infections, or other illnesses. Their level of energy may be such that they are unable to participate in any meaningful way.

Of the four children with whom I worked over the course of this study, three had significant problems with attendance and with coming to school while still not well. Bella and Ethan were afflicted with cold after cold. Ethan, in particular, was sometimes so congested he could barely speak and so tired that he could barely attend to our lessons. Bella was less obviously ill, but her energy level diminished significantly when suffering with a cold. Timmy had allergies. His eyes itched badly when he was in the middle of an attack and when this was especially severe, he was unable to engage with oral presentations by his teacher, much less read. His mother had to pick him up in the middle of the day on several occasions. I was most aware of these issues when they temporarily resolved themselves. It was as if the children had emerged from a sort of intellectual fog and were once again ready to tackle the work ahead.

It is common to assume that proximal factors have the most profound impact on the literacy lives of children. But for the students who participated in this study, exosystem factors

had a greater impact than one might expect. Standardized tests, chosen not by their teachers but by those with little day-to-day contact with classroom life, clearly established what it meant to be a successful reader in that context. Scripted curriculum partnered with these tests by laying out in great detail the step-by-step process of obtaining the knowledge necessary to do well. And lack of access to appropriate health care minimized the chances that a child could master this knowledge, much less rise above it to join the Literacy Club.

Chronosystem

Bronfenbrenner uses the term chronosystem to refer to the impact of the passage of time on the child as well as on the ecology more generally. It was never completely clear to me what effect the process of learning to read – complete with its times of discouragement – had had on Bella, Sam, and Ethan. Having had a relatively easy time at school, I sometimes try to imagine what it would be like to spend day after day, year after year trying to learn something that was unrelentingly difficult. It seems, however, that the march of literacy time had been somewhat unique for each of these children.

Bella associated the process of learning to read with the process of learning English. She knew full well that her primary reading issue involved a limited English vocabulary and I suspect she realized that, as she became a more adept English learner, her reading would also improve. Nevertheless, despite her many strengths as a learner – a tenacity of approach and amazingly strong low-inference comprehension – by the school district's measures, she was a failure. Because she'd moved from another school at the beginning of third grade and her cumulative file was never transferred, I have no K-2 assessment data. However, in third grade she scored Below Basic on the CST and her fluency scores were always in the *At Risk* range. Over time, she learned (incorrectly, from my perspective) to see herself as a weaker reader than she actually was.

By the end of first grade, Sam was considered proficient in all English language arts areas except oral expression. In second grade he scored Proficient on the CST. At the end of third grade his report card stated that he "reads the words perfectly but doesn't understand them." Up to this point, however, Sam had received solid messages that he was a strong reader. If Bella had developed an inaccurate "poor reader" identity, Sam had adopted an equally erroneous "good reader" identity. When I asked him during our initial assessments to retell the story he had read, he was unable to do so.

Bella and Sam's development was relatively unidirectional, but the temporal aspect of Ethan's literacy was more of a "here today, gone tomorrow" kind of thing. He was retained in first grade, sending the clear message that he was a failure. Then he was placed in a second/third grade combination class – did this mean he was "smart" after all since half the kids were his age? Next was the move to the Bay Area and placement in a fourth grade class where his many strengths were acknowledged. But just as he became comfortable there, off he went to third grade. Even that placement was disrupted with the move to live with relatives in another town. Ethan never really had the opportunity to settle in a coherent literacy environment, a place that could address his needs in a systematic way that built on his strengths. While Bella and Sam had incomplete readerly identities, Ethan's was fully disorganized.

Macrosystem

This is not a good time for children. Oppressive macrosystem factors weigh heavily on many of them. The most recent census figures indicate that nearly one in three U.S. children live in poverty ("Nearly 1 in 3," 2011), despite the fact that well over half of their families includes at least one working parent (National Center for Children in Poverty, n.d.). In addition, the wealth gap between young and old is wider than ever; the average household headed by a person 65 years of age or older has a net worth 47 times greater than a household headed by someone under the age of 35 (Yen, 2011). As one might expect, there is a correlation between poverty and academic outcomes. Sirin (2005) notes that there is a medium-value SES/achievement relationship at the student level (that is, it is likely that any given poor child will not achieve to his/her potential) and a strong relationship at the school level (a low SES school is even more likely to have depressed test scores); this correlation increases as children move through the grades. Rouse and Fantuzzo (2009) found a correlation between poverty and retention in grade as well as low scores in both reading and math at a significance level of .0001. In addition, almost one in three poor children has attended at least three schools by the time they reach third grade (Boyd-Zaharias & Pate-Bain, 2008). Every move requires the child to adjust to a new set of expectations, putting him/her at risk for academic difficulties.

The statistics at my research site are equally troubling. 92.7% of students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch and, as is common on campuses that serve primarily poor children, a third of them do not feel safe at school. Just over half of parents believe the school supports a culture of high expectations. The teachers at this school are dedicated professionals who work very hard to teach the children they serve. But they and their students are up against economic disparity – a disparity which stresses their parents and distracts them from providing the necessary support for their children as readers and writers.

Racial discrimination is also a factor in the lives of children of color as it has always been. Amazingly, this begins before birth. A 2004 study by medical doctors Collins, David, Handler, Wall, and Andes determined that African-American women who have experienced significant interpersonal racism across their lifetime are more likely to give birth to pre-term infants of very low birth weight. And there is a strong correlation between birth risk factors (amount and type of prenatal care, gestation weeks at birth, and birth weight) and academic achievement, significant at the .0001 level (Rouse & Fantuzzo, 2009). As children grow older, their own racial discrimination experiences are connected to a diminishment in curiosity, persistence, and grades (Neblett, Philip, Cogburn, & Sellers, 2006). African-American, Latino, and Native American students are suspended and expelled in disproportionate numbers, have less access to advanced classes, and are more likely to drop out (or be pushed out) of school (Gordon, Piana, & Keleher, 2000). Of course, poverty and race intersect, as well. There are disparities in levels of poverty across races, with White and Asian children less likely and African-American and Latino children much more likely to be poor.

It is difficult to point directly to the effect of race at my research site. However, it is telling that in a survey conducted yearly for the school district, only 58% of children replied that their culture (which may be a proxy for race) was respected at their school. There was also a strained relationship between this site (with English only instruction) and another school that shares the same campus and has a dual immersion program; this struck me as a case of not

racial but rather linguistic discrimination. And at another school in the district where I was previously employed, there were tensions between Latino and African-American parents; a subset of Latino parents encouraged their children to avoid African-American children and it took concerted efforts on the part of teachers to rebuild that bridge.

As oppressive as race and class macrosystems are, an equally powerful factor for the lives of the students with whom I worked was what might be termed *the presumption of incompetence* (Biklen & Burke, 2006). McDermott (1993) describes what this entails:

> Before any teachers of children enter the schools every September, failure is in every room in America. There is never a question of whether everyone is going to succeed or fail, only of who is going to fail. Because everyone cannot do better than everyone else, failure is an absence real as presence, and it acquires its share of children. (1993, p. 295)

In his study of a learning disabled child named Adam, McDermott noticed that the boy was quite effective in negotiating the tasks of everyday life and could manage reasonably well in an after school cooking club so long as he could work with his friend Peter. However, in his classroom, his behavior deteriorated and in one-on-one testing situations his responses were seemingly random. McDermott asserts that the usual explanations for learning difficulty are unable to fully explain the variance between Adam's achievement and behavior and that of other children. Initially, McDermott considered a deficit model for Adam's disability: the more complex the task, the more Adam struggled. But many of the everyday tasks Adam encountered were as cognitively demanding as those of school. Next McDermott surmised that school-based tasks were more difficult because they were more arbitrary and they required Adam to make do without any of the supportive resources (e.g., help from a friend) that he employed with such skill in other environments; but this still begged the question "Why can some students tolerate arbitrariness while others cannot?" Eventually, McDermott came to the conclusion that tasks of the classroom and assessment setting, and the people who participate in these tasks, served to degrade Adam. He notes:

> Many people were involved in Adam's problem. On any occasion of his looking inattentive, for example, it took Adam to look away at just the right time, but it took many others to construct the right time for Adam to look away; it took others to look away from his looking away, and still more to discover his looking away, to make something of it, to diagnose it, to document it, and to remediate it. (1993, p. 273)

This requires Adam to put an enormous amount of energy into his effort to avoid looking incompetent, energy that would have better been directed to the task at hand.

What is missing from McDermott's account – most likely due to the fact that he was writing at a time when accountability was not the be all and end all of education– is a sense of the role of exo- and macro-system factors, as well as individuals, in perpetuating the phenomenon he describes. High-stakes standardized tests operate from the assumption that some proportion of children will fail and that labeling those children as failures will somehow help them to succeed. Scripted curricula operate from the premise that a certain proportion of teachers are failures and that the way to support those that struggle is to tie the hands of all. These programs also presume that lessons with no room for student choice will best serve the most academically vulnerable. It is as if the canyon of failure is so deep that we must continually busy ourselves with filling it. And if our culture did not reproduce children who

were academically unsuccessful, who would do the menial tasks none of the rest of us want to do? The irony is unmistakable. As our state and federal educational policies fail children, they are successful in the maintenance of an economy in which failure is necessary.

When I first met Bella, Sam, and Ethan, others' perceptions of them were chock full of "couldn'ts." Bella couldn't understand, speak or write academic English well. She couldn't read fluently. She couldn't work quickly. Sam couldn't interact with other children. He couldn't understand or think about what he read. He couldn't process his emotions effectively. Ethan couldn't attend to whole group lessons. He couldn't read or spell simple words. He couldn't work up any enthusiasm for books that insulted his intelligence. And, truth be told, I was as cognizant of and distressed about these shortcomings as anyone. Unfortunately, during the course of the year in which I worked with them the degradation wrought by frequent testing and, to a lesser extent, scripted curriculum was palpable. Despite this, the people around Bella, Sam, and Ethan – their peers, teachers, parents, siblings – came to view them as something other than failures. But I worry that in the less nourishing environment of middle school, their difficulties will overshadow their strengths and the growth they made in the course of the time we spent together will not sustain them. As Biklen & Burke (2006) assert, these children need school-based adults whose default stance will be to presume competence and who assume that "students can and will change and, that through engagement with the world, will demonstrate complexities of thought and action that could not necessarily be anticipated" (p. 168).

Ecological Systems Theory Revisited

Bella is not Sam is not Ethan. Each has unique literacy strengths and challenges. Each has unique personality quirks. But, as vulnerable readers, these three children have both produced and been reproduced by the web of interconnected micro-, meso-, and exo-system factors, all within the larger macrosystem context. No matter what literacy coaches, district administrators, test and textbook publishers, and secretaries of education may say, there is nothing simple about helping a child to become literate in an ecology that operates at this level of complexity. Garbarino (1992) suggests that a given child is usually resilient enough to manage disruption in as many as two significant areas of life. But in our current educational climate, we are asking far more of our most vulnerable children than this. In so many classrooms, especially those populated by poor urban children, they frequently fall victim to a host of factors that undermine their progress. Nevertheless, these case studies have demonstrated time and time again the profound resilience and determination with which these children approach the printed word.

Chapter 5: The Learning Partnership

This study wanted very much to be a formative experiment. I remain uncertain about whether it succeeded in becoming one. Can a study fit this definition if things went along so well that no structural changes were necessary and when ongoing change was always a given?

The formative experiment approach had an intuitive appeal for me because it combined a rigorous research design with clear practical applications. I wanted very much to take everything I knew from years of work as a reading specialist and hours reading the research literature and combine them to develop the best possible instructional program for vulnerable readers. I wanted to put this program into practice and learn as much as I could about what served to support these children in their literacy development. It seemed to me that a formative experiment design was best-suited to that goal.

Just a word about a similar paradigm – action research. Herr & Anderson (2005) explain the goals of action research in ways that parallel that of formative experiments: the generation of new knowledge and achievement of action-oriented outcomes. They note that practical problems tend to drive the research more than theory or background literature. The most common practitioner of this kind of research is the classroom teacher her/himself and the most common audience for it is other teachers. Solving a practical problem was always at the core of my work, but the ecological systems theory framework played a major role in the research design from the very beginning. While I implemented as well as designed the intervention, I was not the classroom teacher for the children with whom I worked, and I conceived the audience for this research more broadly to include researchers, teacher educators, and policy analysts, as well as other teachers.

Reinking & Bradley (2008) describe formative experiment goals as "uniting the two fundamental urges that motivate many educational researchers: to gain deep theoretical understandings of teaching and learning and to use those understandings to make education more effective and enriching" (p. 2). In their view, formative experiments are uniquely positioned to bridge the researcher/practitioner divide by merging the two perspectives. They go on to list the following defining characteristics:

- Authentic: intended to produce change in the setting in which it is conducted;
- Theoretical: generative of theories that are "humble and local in contrast to more grandiose" (p. 18);
- Goal-oriented: providing a clear goal and explaining why that goal is pedagogically important;
- Adaptive and iterative: not preoccupied with fidelity; open to change, typically in cycles;
- Methodologically inclusive and flexible: commonly including both quantitative and qualitative data; adjusting data collection as needed over the course of the intervention; and
- Pragmatic: focusing on consequential validity in which results have demonstrated instructional value.

As should be clear by now, this dissertation study reflects most of these criteria. The fuzziest area is that of iteration. While the intervention certainly changed over time, the process was an evolutionary one; there were no specific points at which I made formal revisions to the structure of the intervention or the research plan. In a sense, change *was* the

intervention, since our sessions – particularly those in the tutorial setting – ebbed and flowed depending on each child's progress and level of interest.

Cobb, Confrey, deSessa, Lehrer, & Schnauble (2003) suggest that this design is, in fact, iterative in the broadest sense since, so long as a comprehensive record of on-going changes is kept, it is perfectly acceptable for revisions to be fluid in nature. I kept such a record via the lesson-planning I did and the notes I took as I reviewed audio- and video-tapes of sessions. Reinking & Watkins (2000) appear to agree, noting that they expected data collection and modifications would progress "through well-defined cycles [but] in practice, we found the process to be more fluid, even at times ad hoc, because adaptations were often based on the intuitive demands of the moment rather than on extensive reflection upon the accumulated data" (p. 399).

Cobb, et al., (2003) also note ways in which this type of research is well-suited to an ecological systems perspective. They argue that formative research is particularly sensitive to ways in which elements of the educational ecology function together to support learning – an ecology which typically includes:

> the tasks or problems that students are asked to solve, the kinds of discourse that are encouraged, the norms of participation that are established, the tools and related material means provided, and the practical means by which classroom teachers can orchestrate relations among these elements. (2003, p. 9)

Several literacy studies using a formative experiment design served as models for my work. Duffy (2001) designed and implemented a summer school program for elementary-level struggling readers. She explained that her decision to serve as the teacher as well as the researcher was based in her concern that the program be implemented by someone who was well-positioned to see both the strengths and weaknesses of the design before it was employed by classroom teachers. Duffy described her teaching as responsive, that is, "scaffolded instruction that the teacher continuously modifies and attempts to improve based on his or her ongoing observations and assessments of the needs and progress of his or her students" (p. 71). Over the course of the intervention she adjusted homework procedures, varied areas of emphasis, and responded to affective issues. In their 2007 study of adolescent readers, Ivey & Broaddus incorporated changes such as expanding the range of reading materials, identifying supports that made challenging texts more accessible, and varying instructional groupings (less whole class and more small group, partner, and one-on-one work). Similar beliefs and decisions are reflected in my study as well.

In many ways, my study resembled what, in other fields, is termed improvisation. Nachmanovitch (1990) views improvisation as a balance of "structure and spontaneity" (p. 5), as "free play sloshing against the power of limits" (p. 33). It requires that those involved live very much in the moment, attentively watching and listening to cues from other people and from the environment as a whole. Nachmanovitch notes that there is a role for intuitive hunches as well as careful planning and that, in fact, over-planning can get in the way of learning. He suggests that, in an improvisatory environment, mistakes are valuable, leading the way to better and more powerful decisions. With reference to teaching, Nachmanovitch asserts that "you have to teach each person, each class group, and each moment as a particular

case that calls out for a particular handling" (p. 20). All of these attributes were reflected in this study.

Instructional Program: Content and Structure

There is no clear and nuanced model of Tier 3 support in the Response to Intervention literature and supplying such a model was one of the major goals of this study. The intervention I provided occurred in two contexts: one-on-one sessions and small group meetings. The tutorial sessions were designed to focus on the particular academic and personal needs of each individual child. The role of the small group time was to provide opportunities for high-level thinking and to encourage the development of a classroom community that would support all of the children. In this section of the chapter, I will describe the structure of these contexts and the content covered within them.

Tutorial Sessions

Most of the tutorial sessions followed a three-part structure: work toward collaboratively-defined goals, supported reading, and independent reading. During the goals aspect of the lesson, the children worked on and charted progress toward a reading-related goal. Supported reading time involved interactive reading of a narrative or, more commonly, an expository text at approximately the child's instructional level. Students also read an independent level text of their own choosing; I read my own book during this time in order to serve as a model of engaged reading.

Goal-setting. It was very important to me that the children had some control over the content and process of our tutorial work. I developed a list of reading skills and strategies[17] and, after completing initial assessments for each child, rated each as a strength, a challenge, or something in between. Before sharing my scores with them, I had the children rate themselves in each of these areas. Then we compared notes, looking for elements of reading which we both agreed were challenging. Next the child selected a specific goal to work on and we developed a plan for reaching that goal. For example, if the child decided that (s)he wanted to read more fluently, options might include timed repeated readings; a qualitative assessment of prosody; a series of lessons dealing with various aspects of fluency like "chunking" phrases and reading with expression; or some combination of these. Finally, we predicted how long it would take to reach the goal. Once the first goal was achieved, we set another.

Bella's first goal-setting experience serves as an exemplar. She was quick to select learning word meanings as her first goal. She wanted me to record difficult words from the texts we read on 3X5 cards and write the meaning on the back. Then she would take them home to practice. She initially thought that she wanted to learn fifty new words before moving on to another goal, but when I explained that, at about five words per session, it would take five weeks or so to reach her goal, she reconsidered and decided twenty words was a better choice. I showed her the graph we'd use to keep track of her progress. In the end, I believe that learning about strategies for using context to figure out word meanings was more beneficial for Bella than the word card technique (I suspect she never practiced them at home). Nevertheless, I think it was important to include her ideas in our plan and she reached her goal after about three weeks.

[17] See Appendix E for the list.

Unlike Bella who was remarkably in tune with her strengths and challenges, Ethan tended to over-estimate or under-estimate his abilities and his goal-setting process was less typical. He viewed figuring out word meanings and retelling stories as challenges despite the fact that, in my opinion, he was quite good at both of these aspects of reading. On the other hand, while he had great difficulty with decoding and was a slow, choppy reader, he saw these areas as relative strengths. The only area we both designated as a challenge was reading with expression. I feared that if we chose this as our initial area of focus, struggles with more fundamental skills would thwart his progress. On our very first day together, I faced a dilemma – whether to go with his inclination or to try to persuade him to think a little smaller at first.

I don't believe in a "hierarchy of skills" and I've generally found that letting students take the lead in goal-setting is the way to go. But, in this case, my instincts told me that this would lead to frustration and would not make for a good beginning to our partnership. I was upfront with Ethan about my concerns:

> Elizabeth: I gave you more C's [for *challenge*] in [the areas of] using letter sounds and word parts and reading smoothly. Do you think any of those would be a better first choice for a goal?
>
> Ethan: Yeah.
>
> Elizabeth: Yeah? Which one do you think? It's kind of hard to read with expression if you don't read smoothly and it's kind of hard to read smoothly if you can't figure out the words. So if you WANT, we could focus on letter sounds or word parts for a while. What do you think?
>
> Ethan: I think [indecipherable – I think "words"]
>
> Elizabeth: OK, should we start with letter sounds in small words or should we start with longer words?
>
> Ethan: Longer?

At this point, Ethan was not convinced that working with me was a good idea and, as a result, chose to remain relatively disengaged from this conversation. When I asked him how we might specify a particular goal and how we might work toward that goal, he said without hesitation, "No, I got no ideas." In the end we agreed that I would take a look at the results of his Names Test and we'd revisit the process at our next session.

In the interim, I reviewed Ethan's assessment results and was a bit dismayed. Not only did he struggle with multi-syllable words but with shorter, decodable words, as well as a number of sight words. Feeling, in truth, completely manipulative, I decided that I would position work on these simpler skills as a stage in the process toward reading longer words, and simply tell him how we would proceed:

> Elizabeth: Normally I have kids decide exactly what the goal is and when we should meet it, but for this part I'm actually going to TELL you because I think it will be simpler that way. I think it will take two lessons to get those sight words learned and a few long vowel words, so that would be the end of your first goal. The next goal will be to learn to use the long vowels pretty well and I think that will probably take five sessions. And then we'll be ready for the longer words, OK?
>
> Ethan: [nods]

Elizabeth: I know it's not exactly what you said you wanted but I think it will work out better this way.

It was important for me to acknowledge that I had not followed his lead and, in contrast to the previous session, Ethan dug right in.

Supported reading. I had greater control over the supported reading part of the tutorial session. From the list we used for goal-setting, I selected a strategy that I felt was a struggle for the student, even if (s)he disagreed. I developed curriculum for addressing these aspects of reading in a format not dissimilar to that used during the goal-setting part of the lesson. While I sometimes used stories and/or read aloud to the students during our goal-setting work, we read expository texts that were at or near their instructional levels during supported reading time.

When I could find several texts that were suitable for work on a particular strategy, I allowed the child to choose among them. Sometimes I thought I had a handle on book topics that would engage students, but I wasn't always correct. After Sam told me about being chased by a tiger in China, I checked out some books on China from the library and we began to read one of them. It soon became evident, however, that I had not chosen well. Sam would never have spontaneously expressed any opposition, so it was up to me to open the door for a text change:

Elizabeth: You've been reading that book on China but I'm wondering if this is very interesting to you. If it is, we'll keep going but if it's NOT the other thing that crossed my mind is since you're already reading this solar system book, you might rather read this book about astronauts. Which do you think is better – keep going with the China book or the astronaut book?

Sam: Um . . . go with this.

Elizabeth : The astronaut book? OK.

We used a variety of different reading techniques during supported reading time, depending on the level of the book and the child's preference. Bella loved to read aloud and, even when the text was challenging, much preferred this to having me read to her. Listening to me seemed to be more difficult for her than reading on her own. If Sam had reading preferences, he never let on, so we switched off on a regular basis. Particularly at the beginning, we couldn't find books for Ethan that were both on a topic that interested him and at a level he could read without help. I read aloud to him a lot, typically asking him to chime in when I stopped at a word or using echo reading where I would read a sentence and he would "echo" it after me.

Whether a part of our goal-setting or supported reading time, lessons often followed Baumann, Jones, & Seifert's (1993) recommended model for strategy instruction. I began by defining and describing the strategy and explaining why it was important. Then I modeled using the strategy and asked the child to think of a time when (s)he had employed it. Next I walked the student through the step-by-step process of applying the strategy and encouraged him/her to use a sentence frame to explain what (s)he had done. I gradually turned over more and more of the responsibility to the child, explained when the strategy would be useful, and how to know if (s)he was using it effectively. Finally, I provided two copies of a bookmark (one for

home and one for school) listing strategy hints to facilitate transfer of what was learned to other contexts.[18]

When students finished reading a book during supported reading time, I took them through a formal evaluation process. I asked them how difficult the book had been (easy, hard, or just right) and how they knew. In an effort to guide my book selection process, I also asked them to rate (on a 1-10 scale) how well they liked the book. Finally, I asked them to think about things they did well in their reading that day. The students frequently connected the focus for the lesson to what they had done well, as was the case in the conversation Bella and I had after she finished her first book:

Elizabeth: Do you think that book was easy, just right, or hard?

Bella: Just right.

Elizabeth: Just right, OK. And what makes you say that?

Bella: Because some of the words were hard and some were not.

Elizabeth: And if you were going to give me a number for how much you liked that book . . .

Bella: [long pause] Three

Elizabeth: And was there anything you did well when you were reading that book? Do you remember?

Bella: I found the meaning of some words?

Elizabeth: Instead of saying *found*, is it OK if I say *figured out* the meaning of some words, 'cause it's not like the meaning was just sitting there and you found it. You figured it out. You used your brain to do that.

Independent reading. Because the students I worked with did not have a regular self-select reading time (SSR) in their classrooms, I felt it was important to provide such a time during our tutorial sessions. Initially I restricted their choices to books at what I had determined to be their independent reading level but, as time went on, I adopted a more flexible approach, trusting them to determine for themselves whether a book "worked" for them or not. In the original plan, I scheduled SSR at the end of the lesson, intending to measure their growth in stamina by the length of time they chose to read. However, I found it difficult to end the rest of the lesson in time, so, particularly for Sam and Ethan who were not naturally interested in reading, I typically moved SSR to the beginning of the lesson. They had more energy at that time and were more likely to read for extended periods.

At the end of independent reading time, I sometimes asked the students a series of questions about how the reading had gone that day (Bomer, 1999). On one occasion, when asked if he had been able to keep the ideas from the book straight in his mind, Ethan replied that they had gotten . . .

Ethan: Kind of mixed up.

Elizabeth: And when you noticed that they were getting kind of mixed up, did you do anything about it or did you just keep going or what?

Ethan: I just kept on going to see if I could remember it.

Elizabeth: OK, and did that work for you?

[18] See Appendix F for an example lesson plan.

Ethan: Um, yeah, kind of.

Elizabeth: Kind of? So, if continuing to read DOESN'T work very well, what are some other things that you could try?

Ethan: I could read back.

Elizabeth: Yeah, did you try that at all?

Ethan: Uh-hmm.

Elizabeth: Yeah? Did it help at all?

Ethan: Yeah.

Given the formative nature of this project, I expected that there would be significant changes to the process as well as the content of our tutorial sessions. The content, of course, evolved naturally as students grasped and effectively applied one strategy after another. Aside from shifting the time for SSR, however, the overall structure seemed to work well for all of the children. There were times, of course, when we didn't get to all the work at hand, but in general we seemed to strike a nice balance early on that we essentially stuck with throughout the year.

Small Group Sessions

While the tutorial sessions provided a level of differentiation that was simply not possible in any other venue, I was committed to small group work for other reasons. Children are, without question, social beings and they learn as much from each other as they do from adults. In the same way that I wished to turn over a great deal of control to children in the tutorial setting, I wanted them to be each other's teachers in the small group environment. I wanted to provide a context in which personal interests and reactions to common texts were shared with peers.

Instruction for children who struggle with literacy is typically characterized by a focus on lower-level skills (Allington, 1983) and reduced expectations (Poole, 2008). I have yet to read a study that suggests that what might be considered "enrichment" activities have any place in the intervention setting and yet there was never any time in which I questioned the intellectual capacity of the children with whom I worked. I believed that including tasks that were both demanding and creative – such as those typically provided to "gifted" readers (Wood, 2008) would foster a literate community. Study Circle and Book Circle fulfilled all these functions.

Study Circle. The goal for Study Circle was to develop a culture of inquiry. Our first task was to discuss what it meant to "study" something and then generate potential topics. A new school building was being erected on site and it had been my thought that we might chronicle the construction – taking pictures, interviewing builders and architects, writing a class book about the experience, and, potentially, constructing a scale model. They would have none of it. Their top choices were animals, insects, nature, money, and space, and, in the end, animals received the most votes. At this point, the children made a list of all the animals they could think of, and each selected one to research. Bella initially chose sea urchins but when the only books on the subject proved too confusing for her, switched to coyotes. Sam picked wolves. Ethan selected Tyrannosaurus Rex but, at some point (maybe as he realized that his was the only extinct animal) decided on sharks. Lions were Timmy's choice. Next, they made a list of everything they already knew about their chosen animal and then asked each other for

additional information. In the meantime, I was hitting many of the local libraries searching for books about these animals that were close enough to their reading levels to prove useful. Once sea urchins were off the table, this proved easier than I had anticipated and each child ended up with at least two books on his/her chosen animal.

We followed a protocol similar to that used by Dreher, et al., (1997). To begin, I asked the children what kind of information they thought they would uncover about their animal and we decided on the following questions: Where do they live? What do they eat? What is their body like? What is known about their babies? -and- What other interesting information can I find? I read aloud a book on pandas and the children helped me recognize what facts to record. We practiced deleting all unnecessary words so that notes were as short as possible and they were less likely to copy directly from the books they consulted, a practice common among children at this age (Dreher, 1995). For example, a sentence such as *Pandas consume tender bamboo shoots* was pared down to ~~*Pandas consume tender*~~ *bamboo* ~~*shoots*~~ and recorded on the What Do They Eat? chart. Once the children were relatively comfortable with this process, they worked independently (with my support) to take notes from at least two books, one website, and, in Ethan's case, a video. I explained how they could use the index to help them look for answers to the questions we'd generated, but most chose to read the books from the beginning, jotting notes as they went along; this came as no surprise since Dreher (1995) has found that even children who understand how to use the index rarely do so. I suspect this may also have been due to the fact that one area of focus was on finding miscellaneous information that was unrelated to any of the specific questions. They talked a lot as they worked, sharing interesting tidbits with each other, and we stopped occasionally to give more formal updates.

Drafting – taking their notes and reconstituting them as sentences again – proved more difficult. Some children had trouble remembering what their skeletal notes meant. In an effort to catch up after an absence, some had dictated notes to me, and then insisted they couldn't read my handwriting. Bella erroneously employed the first/next/then/finally structure she had been taught for procedural writing. Sam occasionally used words that he didn't know the meaning of when pressed. Yet Ethan, who had had the most trouble writing in his classroom, managed quite well, proceeding step-by-step through his notes. They also selected two of the following special pages to include in their books: About the Author, glossary, contents, and index (all of which were modeled for them).

In many ways, the students were very supportive of each other throughout this process, but they were of little help when it came to listening to each other's drafts and noting parts that didn't make sense to them. Despite the fact that I found many confusing parts, only Sam noted even one. By this time we'd spent quite a lot of time on this project and I made the decision that independent/pair revision would not be a major focus. I met with each student and went through her/his draft adjusting as we went. They were much more capable of proofreading than revising, especially when I marked their papers with symbols that showed which lines of text were missing capital letters and periods, or contained misspelled words. Finally, they drew lines in the text to show me where the ends of pages were and whether or not they wanted an illustration on any given page. I sewed bound books for them and typed and glued in the text. They drew pictures and put them into their books as well.

We celebrated the completion of the books! The students read them for the rest of the group and everyone applauded and offered specific compliments about the content and the illustrations. We played a version of *Jeopardy!* using questions whose answers were included in their books. I could never convince Sam or Timmy to read their books to their classmates, nor to allow me or their teachers to do so, but Bella read hers energetically. Ethan moved away that week so never had this opportunity. All the families responded with great enthusiasm. This inquiry project had gone a long way in building a sense of camaraderie in our little group and positioned these students as knowledgeable and committed scholars.

Book Circle. If the purpose of Study Circle was to integrate new with prior knowledge and produce an expository text, the goal of Book Circle was to connect to story characters in profound ways, think at a deep level about the interworkings of plot, and interact with others to construct text meaning. Because I wanted to evoke thoughts and feelings about their shared experience of vulnerability within the realm of literacy, but had no intention of running a therapy group, I selected four stories that had as main characters people who struggled with literacy or with school more broadly.[19] Whenever possible, I brought in multiple copies of each text since, in general, the children were better able to attend when they followed along as I read aloud than they were when they were forced to depend on listening alone; partner reading also worked well on some occasions.

I had researched the topic of discussion and fully intended to adopt one of the discussion formats described in the articles I read. But there were features of each discussion technique that made it, I felt, less than suitable for our purposes. Given that these children had very little experience with open-ended small group discussions, my primary goal was to encourage them to talk at length and in depth about aspects of the books that they actually cared about. Soter, et al.'s (2008) efferent approaches seemed too directed and produced too high a ratio of teacher-to-student talk. The critical-analytical forms were intriguing but tended to be too sophisticated for children at their level of experience. Book Club was an interesting format, but it included no adult member to push student thinking. In addition, in at least one research study (Clarke, 2006) that utilized this approach, interpersonal difficulties undermined the discussion and marginalized some group members. Grand Conversations (Peterson & Eeds, 1990) and Literature Circles (Daniels, 1994) were closest to the approach I had envisioned, but both had drawbacks. The former expected the teacher to regularly intervene in the conversation. The latter commonly structured the work by assigning to students specific roles and it had been my experience that instruction in role protocols overshadowed the discussion itself. Neither systematically taught students how to write discussion questions that addressed their own personal concerns.

In the end, I decided to use as the predominant discussion technique a format that I had developed with a fourth grade teacher some fifteen years ago. I talked with the children about how questions that were great for discussion differed from the test-like questions with which they were more familiar. We wrote such questions together in a sort of immersion approach to learning, generating at least three possible answers to go with each question as evidence that it

[19] Titles listed in Chapter 4.

would, in fact, promote discussion. Then I taught them strategies to employ if they ran into one of the following difficulties:

- If they couldn't come up with an idea for a question, they could think about their favorite part of the story and write a question about that.
- If they had an idea, but couldn't figure out how to formulate the question, they could begin with one of the question stems I provided (e.g., Why do you think . . .?).
- If they'd written a question, but were having difficulty generating possible answers, they could try to imagine what their mother would say in response to it, or their best friend, or a police officer.

This process came more easily to some students than to others; nevertheless, when it came time for our first discussion, each had a question to share.

I also taught them a protocol for the discussion itself. We used a beach stone (dubbed the Talking Rock) to facilitate turn-taking. No one could speak unless they held the rock. One child would ask his/her question and then pass the rock to another child whose hand was raised. This would continue until all comments were exhausted and then we'd change topics. I played very specific roles. I took notes on the questions asked and comments offered. When students made statements that were intriguing but not completely clear, I paraphrased what they'd said, checking in to make sure my paraphrase reflected the true intent of their comment; at times I also nudged them forward with follow-up questions like "Can you say more about that?" Occasionally, I raised my hand to contribute ideas, but, just like any other participant, the children could choose whether they wanted to call on me or not.

After the first discussion, we talked about things the group had done well (e.g., having interesting ideas) and things we could do better (e.g., ignoring distracting noises from people coming in and out of the room). Each child also set his/her own discussion goal; Sam's was to speak more loudly, Timmy planned to talk more frequently, and Bella chose to focus on stating her ideas clearly. We revisited these goals after each ensuing discussion.

Instructional Program: Process and Interaction

The structure and content of the tutorial and small-group sessions was, of course, important. The structure, especially during our one-on-one time, was relatively predictable and allowed students to focus on learning rather than on figuring out what we'd be doing each day. The tutorial content emphasized the aspects of reading that were difficult for them, addressed in an environment that celebrated their strengths, and our small-group work pushed them to think at a high level about what they read. Nevertheless, it is my belief – well-supported in the data – that it was the *process* of the experience we shared and our moment-to-moment interactions that proved most crucial to their literacy growth. There were five aspects to this process that seem most relevant: increasing motivation, questioning, clarity, response to error, and response to success. I'll describe each in turn.

Increasing Motivation

There are any number of suggestions for increasing reader motivation within the research literature (Ostroskey, et al., 2006; Ryan, et al, 1994; Subban, 2006; Turner & Paris, 1995; Wentzel, 1997). Of interest to me is that the two that seemed most effective in this intervention – positioning the tutor as a human being with faults as well as virtues and building community – are rarely mentioned. In some ways, I was as vulnerable as were the children in

this context, finding my way day by day to offer something that helped them. They seemed to appreciate the fact that I was not a know-it-all and faced my own challenges as we moved forward. In addition, we all worked together to establish and cultivate a community of learners where everyone could relax and do their best work.

Tutor as human. Over the course of our work together, I exhibited feelings and behaviors that were, by turns, positive and limited. In some way, I believe, each served to motivate students to do better because it was clear that, like them, I had my limitations.

Amazement. There were times when things that the children said and did flat-out amazed me. Sam was remarkably good at guessing words for our weekly Wheel of Fortune puzzle, even with minimal letter clues (e.g., figuring out that the missing word in "We will s_ _ _ _ animals" was *study*), causing me to shake my head and smile. While we were working on thinking about what we know before reading, Sam made a long list of things he knew about spiders. Early on in the book, we had the following exchange:

> Elizabeth: Oh, by the way, it just told us one of these things. Which one of these things that you knew did it tell us about?
>
> Sam: Uh, this one [pointing].
>
> Elizabeth: Yup, number six (venom is poisonous). Wow! We haven't even gotten into the main part of the book yet [and many of your ideas have appeared]!

During the time the students were learning about writing discussion questions for which they were expected to generate at least three possible answers, Bella told us that she had already produced far more than that and I feigned disbelief:

> Bella: I got eleven reasons.
>
> Elizabeth: Eleven reasons? No!

On other occasions, achievements were more limited but still worthy of celebration such as when Bella successfully figured out that she could build a single word – *earthquakes* – from all the letter tiles she had at her disposal.

I wanted the children to understand that I could be equally excited by information found in books. Sam and I learned about the height of ant hills ("Can you imagine that? So there could be an ant hill that goes all the way from the floor in here to the ceiling!") and Ethan and I discovered that the Goliath beetle was as large as a man's hand ("That's HUGE!"). By far the most interesting information came up as students were finishing drafts of their books on animals and shared them with the group. The enthusiasm was contagious with students ooh-ing and ah-ing in amazement. It turns out that coyotes are omnivores, wolves can run for 50 miles without resting, and there is a recipe for Warthog Pot Roast on the Internet!

Amusement. Jokes and laughter were very much a part of our work together and the nature of that humor varied from child to child. Many of the light-hearted moments I shared with Bella had to do with idiosyncrasies of the English language – that *rarest* and *paleontologist* are difficult to pronounce, that "The Tyrannosaurus Rex charged," has nothing to do with a credit card, that catastrophe is "a mess of a word," and that, when speaking about burglar alarms, *going off* and *going on* mean the same thing. I also frequently made fun of myself – being virtually blind without my glasses and oblivious to the fact that school had let out early that day. Sam and I were more likely to laugh about information in the books we read together – the picture of a spider dangling from a silk thread above a sleeping person's mouth; the

concept of ants "milking" aphids; the fact that at a young age, Helen Keller walked around the dinner table grabbing other people's food. Sam allowed that this behavior would not be tolerated at his house.

Probably because there were multiple parties ready to join in, we were more likely to tell actual jokes during the small group time. Timmy considered the possibility that he might illustrate his book with a lion sitting on a thrown since he is "King of Beasts." One day we were considering what reasons would serve to support a particular position taken in discussion and I was attempting to write them on the board.

Elizabeth: These markers are driving me insane. I'm just going to lose my mind right here in front of you.

Timmy: Can I go to the bathroom?

Elizabeth: Yes, as long as you're thinking of reasons while you're there.

Limitations. There were times, however, when all was not sweetness and light. While this never occurred in the tutorial setting, sometimes I felt frustrated during small group sessions and showed it. Typically this occurred when students were unfocused. At times I simply named the feeling ("Excuse me. I am losing my patience!"). On other occasions, I labeled what I saw and heard. After Ethan commented on my shoes and then, out of the blue, asked where coffee came from, I replied, "This is the second time today that you've said something that has absolutely nothing to do with what we're talking about." At other times I simply reiterated what I needed them to do ("Bella, just READ your question.") or explained why I needed them to attend ("I can't tell you how important it is for you to really pay attention and learn how to do this so I'm not running around answering questions that you should know the answer to, OK?"). Generally speaking, I blew off a little steam, calmed down, and things got back to normal. Once in a great while my impatience lingered and I felt the need to apologize for losing my temper. At one point, I also said I was sorry for confusing them with a lesson that was ill-conceived and unnecessarily confusing.

There were also times when I myself was confused and I let them know. A book Sam was reading attempted to explain what kept spacecraft in orbit. I didn't understand this concept any better than he did. On a regular basis I didn't know things that the children might have expected me to know – like how to pronounce a character's name, how Civil War flag bearers held their flags, what the phrase "into the breach" meant, and in which Oakland neighborhood the author Patricia Polacco grew up. Many a time I couldn't find things I needed – pens, papers, letter tiles – and the children often helped me unearth them.

Even when I was quite confident in my knowledge, I sometimes used language that was tentative in nature, allowing them the opportunity to question my assertions. "I guess," "I think," "if I remember correctly," were common openings. In our first session, Ethan asserted that I had said he would be working with me only during small group time; I told him, "I don't remember what I said, to be honest with you." One day Bella asked me to explain the word *officially*. I replied, "That means, I don't know, officially means *for sure*, kind of." It was important that the students feel able to assert themselves and the regular expression of my own uncertainty seemed to support this.

The students with whom I worked had strengths and limitations and, over the course of our time together, exhibited a range of emotions. Rather than position myself as an adult who

knew everything and was unflaggingly calm, I let them see me as I was– warts and all. It is wonderful for children to look up to the adults in their lives, but this may lead them to believe that they are the only ones to struggle with content, processes, emotions – even with finding a marker. In my view it is more motivating for them to see us make our way through the day, dealing with disruption as it appears.

A community of learners. Research suggests that when students believe themselves to be members of a community of learners, they are more motivated to learn and to support each other in their learning (Ciani, Middleton, Summers, & Sheldon, 2010; Wentzel, Battle, Russell, & Looney, 2010). This study offers additional evidence for this claim. I made every effort to establish and sustain such a community in both the tutorial and small group settings.

Tutorial: We're in this together. When it is most effective, the tutorial context is, of course, a community of two, a working partnership. I intended the tutoring sessions in this study to offer a different climate entirely from two other forms of tutoring that I have observed – one that focuses exclusively on isolated academic tasks with the tutor (or scripted tutoring plan) making all the decisions, and the other in which significant amounts of time are spent with the child and tutor sharing details of their personal lives. We most certainly worked toward the academic goals I had identified and were interested in each other as people, but our shared project had little in common with either of the two tutoring models noted above. I wanted the students to understand that they did not need to walk the path to literacy on their own – that we were, in fact, co-learners. We asked questions and answered those posed by the other. And, by using plural pronouns on a regular basis, we engaged in discourse that was fundamentally inclusive.

There were, of course, times when I asked the kind of questions common to teacher/student relationships: what's the main thing this page talks about? what do you think that word means? why do you think the character made that decision? But there were also many times when the children knew something that I didn't know and the questions were more collegial and, in a way, more genuine. Some of these related to the content of texts. Bella stated that raccoons had caused her mother to "get all itchy." I asked if it was possible that some sort of insect on the raccoon might have caused the allergic reaction, but Bella explained in some detail that it had, in fact, been the raccoon itself. I suspect that Bella was incorrect about this, but there seemed to be no real reason to challenge her and she enjoyed explaining an event with which I was unfamiliar. On other occasions, I asked about experiences the children had had. I wondered how Bella's family had reacted when she read aloud the book she'd written on coyotes and she explained that they had enjoyed it. Sam shared very little of his life outside of school with me. But one day we were reading about tigers and he told me that, when he visited China, he had been chased by one. I was completely dumb-founded by this revelation and couldn't contain myself, asking if he'd been born there, how old he'd been at the time, whether family members lived there, how many times he'd visited, and, finally, whether he'd be interested in reading a book about China. He patiently answered each question – I'd rarely seen him this chatty – and agreed that reading about China might be enjoyable.

Wanting them to know that they could depend on me to supply any content and process information they felt they needed, I also answered a range of questions posed by them.

Ethan was fascinated by the ongoing supply of books on the Revolutionary and Civil Wars I brought in for him to read. He wanted to know where I'd found them – which library in particular. As we read these books, he wanted to know if the illustrations were photographs and when boats were first used during war. He also asked a number of questions about the process we followed: when we'd be meeting and why I kept asking him to spell words with the *re-* prefix during Making Big Words time. Bella's process questions were even more numerous. She wanted to know if she'd be choosing her own writing topic, if we were going to read a particular book, when she should return her vocabulary practice cards, when she'd receive her goal certificate, why the children needed to use pseudonyms (and whether I couldn't please use her real name on her goal certificates), when she'd have the chance to write her About the Author page. Bella, in particular, was intensely curious and answering her many questions established our relationship as a collegial one.

As I reviewed the tutorial transcripts, I noticed that I regularly used plural rather than singular pronouns. Of those instances in which this was appropriate, the plural form was used nearly 70% of the time. In suggesting alternatives for figuring out word meanings, for example, I said, "If *we* didn't know this word *we* could read ahead and figure out what it meant or *we* could re-read from the beginning." I tended to use the singular form most frequently when referring to a child's specific accomplishment, something I wanted to attribute to him/her. When Bella told me that she'd done a good job of "finding the meaning of words," I assured her, "You figured it out. You used your head to do that." After hearing me use the plural form only three times, Bella herself began to do so: "Those are the words we are going to learn?" she asked. While I never made a formal decision to use pronouns to portray us as "partners in crime," I think this discourse served to confirm that we were working together to grow as learners.

Small group: A bigger community. On the first day of Study Circle, I established norms for our work together that had proven effective over years of teaching: Work hard. Be kind. I wanted the children to understand that this was to be a productive environment, a place where they were expected to apply themselves to the work at hand and where they could take risks without fear of ridicule. We talked about what it would look and sound like if we all behaved in this way; they suggested that children would be applying themselves to assigned and/or selected tasks and that they would be polite to each other.

We worked collaboratively to make decisions. Our first Study Circle task was to select our topic of study. The children brainstormed topics that they were interested in – everything from money to space. They were allowed to vote for as many topics as they wished and we considered only those topics that all expressed an interest in, thereby assuring that no one would be excluded from the enthusiasm. In the end they settled on animals and, knowing that they could help each other as much as they wished, all preferred to research their own particular favorite rather to work with a partner.

We began each class period by playing a literacy-based version of the television game show *Wheel of Fortune.* I composed a message about the day's events (e.g., This morning we will be learning how to take notes from a website) which looked like this when written on the board: - - - -/- - - - - - -/- -/- - - -/- -/- - - - - - - -/- - -/- -/- - - -/- - - - -/- - - -/-/- - - - - - -. They took turns suggesting letters that might fit in the puzzle and, after a while, complete words,

ultimately guessing the whole sentence. While they recognized that some of their friends were more naturally facile with this process than others (specifically, Sam), all participated with great enthusiasm. An individual child didn't "win" the game; it was all of them against me and, of course, I was always the loser!

I was careful to model the type of positive interactions I expected from them and ways they could support each other. I encouraged children to do their best when they were feeling discouraged and noted when Wheel of Fortune guesses made sense, even if they weren't precisely correct. One day, when all the other students were sharing lists of the animals they were considering writing about, Timmy was reluctant to do so. Several of the other children encouraged him and I "translated" their comments: "What your friends are telling you is that they're interested in what you've got." Before they began reading about their animal of choice, I explained that each of them would serve as an "expert" for some particular aspect of the research process. Sam, for example, would be the person to ask if they ran into a word that they were unable to pronounce, Timmy was the word meaning expert, and Bella and Ethan were comprehension gurus for single sentences and lengthier text segments, respectively. When it came time to work in pairs to help each other with revision, we established a process protocol that would have the desired result without causing undue stress: "We are all a team here and we want to make people feel comfortable. So [if you hear a confusing part] you just say, 'You know, I don't think that quite makes sense.'" Bella suggested that, in addition, they explain why the passage was confusing.

While few and far between, there were times when I had to short-circuit negative interactions as well as model and support positive ones. Bella, in particular, could be cranky. One day she told Timmy to sit up and, later, to pay attention. I explained rather pointedly that she should mind her own business and stick to making comments about things that actually affected her. Paul had an unfortunate habit of telling other children what word guess they should offer during Wheel of Fortune. After ignoring this for some time, it became clear that he needed to understand the inherent message he was conveying: "What it means when you do that is, 'I'm smarter than you [so I need to tell you the answer]. Do you like people to say things like that to you?" One day, Timmy laughed at Bella for pronouncing the word China with a long e sound. I noted that this would be the correct pronunciation in her native Spanish; Timmy appeared both chastised and intrigued and never mocked anyone again. On only one occasion (early on in our time together) was there a good deal of negativity from virtually everyone. We began our next session together processing our relationship with an agreement that it was important for everyone to feel good about being there. When we played *Jeopardy!* at the end of our Study Circle time, Paul and Ethan handily beat Bella and Sam. I worried that the opportunity to gloat would be irresistible, but instead, Ethan praised everyone for their good work.

By the time Book Circle began in February, our little community of learners was such a solid one that it could weather Ethan's departure, and the entry of two new members, without a hitch. I said very little to Miley and Billy about the details of our working relationship. Bella, Sam, Timmy, and Paul served as role models for these new members; it was almost as if they knew they had to mentor these new apprentices into the cultural practices of the group. As we discussed shared texts, the children generally listened attentively to what their friends had to

say. Within a few weeks they were responding to each other's comments as well to the question at hand, a practice that many an adult book club would do well to emulate. There is no doubt in my mind that the sense of community the children felt served as the crucial foundation for our work together.

Questioning is Not Interrogation

There is considerable evidence that the kinds of questioning protocols common in classrooms are not productive for children. The average teacher asks 300-400 questions per day (Levin & Long, 1981) Most are of the low-inference variety (typically referred to as "literal") (Tienken, Goldberg, & DiRocco, 2009) and, after waiting for, on average, less than a second (Rowe, 1986) the teacher calls on a child whose behavior is characterized more by speed than accuracy. The teacher then assesses that answer, establishing what is commonly referred to as an Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) pattern (Cazden, 1988; Mehan, 1982). I was committed to a very different kind of protocol. I asked a range of questions about word meanings and facts, as well as those that demanded higher level thinking, both about content and process. However, if the child was unable to respond appropriately, I provided additional information or asked scaffolding questions designed to nudge him/her in the right direction. Interactions with Bella during tutorial sessions provide the clearest examples of these protocols.

Bella's first goal was to learn the meanings of new words and several examples of questioning give-and-take come from that work. One day she was reading a book about zebras and stumbled over the word *herd.* I suspected that she didn't understand what this word meant and asked her. After giving her some extended time to respond, I provided richer context for the word than that offered in the text (I saw a *herd* of zebras running across the plain). She was able to use the more substantive context to figure out the word meaning and even recognized that, in doing so, she had made an inference of sorts. At that point, we had a brief discussion of "large" inferences (those she was used to defining as such) and "small" inferences (using context to determine the meaning of a word). Another day, Bella was reading about dinosaurs and the text mentioned that Tyrannosaurus Rex *scouted* for food. Once again I asked whether she knew what the word meant and allowed time for her to respond. I remembered that – much to my dismay (but that's another story) – the fourth-grade teachers designated specific children to watch over their peers and report back on who was well-behaved; children serving in this role were termed *scouts.* I reminded Bella of this and asked her what these children were supposed to do and how they knew which of their friends to select for recognition. Bella looked at me skeptically, so I offered a silly alternative: that they sat with their eyes closed during the lesson. Bella disconfirmed this assertion and used her classroom experience to determine that the T-Rex *looked around* for food. On another occasion, Bella struggled with the meaning of *mid-section*. I hinted that it was part of her body, but this didn't seem to help. In retrospect, I might have linked mid- with the word *middle*. In the end, I simply told her the meaning rather than prolong the discussion past the point of usefulness – sometimes the best policy.

The zebra text provides an example of a low-inference questioning protocol. The text mentioned that the zebra's stripes served two purposes – to confuse predators by making it difficult for them to select a single victim from a sea of stripes, and to assist baby zebras in

finding their mother since each animal's stripe pattern is unique. I wasn't confident that Bella had grasped these facts and so asked her about it. She understood the former purpose but claimed that the stripes were a form of protection (essentially the same answer as the first). I suggested that she re-read the paragraph that presented this information, which she did, telling me that stripes helped zebras tell each other apart. I confirmed that this was true, but pushed her further: which zebras needed to employ this strategy? She said that all of them did and I provided a forced choice: babies or adults? After she selected adults, I suggested she re-read the single sentence that contained the information. Was it absolutely crucial that she determine the correct answer to this question? Probably not. What I hope this interaction offered was a process for accessing information that is not immediately remembered by going back into the text and considering alternatives.

Bella selected making inferences from text as a goal early on. When I asked this type of question, I typically labeled it as such to help her differentiate between questions demanding an answer that could be *found* and those that had to be *figured out* by reading across sentences. One day we were reading a book about animals' coats and I asked her if she could infer why these coats differed from species to species. Bella stated that different animals had different coats because their mothers had – true, of course, but not very helpful. Intuiting that it was the wording of the question rather than her answer that was problematic, I rephrased it: "What benefit do animals get from the particular coats they have?" Bella wasn't quite sure what to make of this question, so I broke it down further, asking how spikes were helpful to certain fish and feathers to birds, both of which she could answer easily.

There were distinct questioning patterns related to the process of our work together as well as the content. In early fall we worked on accessing prior knowledge before reading and looking out for confirmation of that knowledge as we read. While this information was often included in the text, there were times when the text didn't mention the facts the child knew; I wanted the students to understand that books would frequently (but not always) confirm their knowledge. Prior to reading about animals' coats, Bella told me that some animals' skins were wet and cold and when we completed the reading, I asked her whether that fact had been included in the text. She knew that it had not. She was puzzled by my follow-up question – does that mean that no animals have wet, cold skin? – so I took another step back and asked if she could think of an animal with cold, wet skin. While her answer (duck) may not have been the best of choices (I added frog as another example), it helped her to understand that her fact was not wrong, but simply not included, and that each book she might read on a specific topic would exclude a certain amount of information, including that which was part of her knowledge base.

It is important to recognize that questioning protocols may be studied and employed logically but that, in the end, they must be used flexibly if they are to obtain the desired result – that result being an awareness of how to access and generate information of all kinds in a variety of contexts. This was, in fact, meta-questioning, that is learning about how to be successful in the questioning process more so than answering a specific question correctly. In general, I found that waiting (both immediately after asking a question and after the child's response) was key. This conveyed to the students that responding quickly was not the goal, that I respected their ideas enough to wait for them to think things through, and that once they

said something, they could take the time to elaborate. Our interactions, even if they began with a question I had asked, were relaxed and conversational in tone.

The Importance of Clarity

In an effort to guarantee that we spent considerable amounts of time actually reading, I employed the succinct and efficient strategy instruction protocol described on pages 125-126. Sam was particularly enamored of these strategy lessons because the systematic approach to reading appealed to him. He selected making predictions as his initial goal and the following is an excerpt from our first session on this topic.

> Elizabeth: A prediction is a special kind of guess. It's a guess about what's going to happen based on what you already know and also that you're giving a reason for your guess. So a good prediction is one that you can give a reason for. Whether it turns out to be correct is really not all that important. Now the reason it's really important to be able to predict in order to be a good reader is because it gives us a reason to stayed focused because we're reading to find out if our prediction is correct or not.

I went on to provide an example of a wild guess (weather prediction of 85 degrees in winter) and, in contrast, a reasonable prediction (50 degrees with rain) for which a reason could be given (e.g., meteorologist's forecast or similar weather the previous day). When I asked Sam if he had previously made predictions while reading or in other situations, he said that he had not. Then I introduced Sam to a step-by-step process for predicting: 1) predict, 2) give a reason, 3) read, 4) prove or disprove, 5) hold on or let go; I also provided him with a sentence frame that would facilitate his participation: I think _____, because _____. I also explained that predicting was especially useful before beginning to read or if he found himself losing interest. Over time, he took more responsibility for the process and eventually I gave him a bookmark with the predicting steps printed on it so he could use it as he read independently; he later told me that he regularly referred to it at home.

Of course, things rarely went as smoothly as I might have imagined – or hoped for; the work was frequently more recursive – we made progress, hit a snag, returned for modeling, etc. This was the case with self-monitoring, a strategy I taught to all of the students. I'll again use my work with Sam as an example. From the beginning, Sam struggled to recognize when he didn't understand what he was reading. I postponed work on this concept because I thought he would be resistant to it until we had built a stronger relationship. By our twentieth session, I felt it was time. I explained that all readers struggled to comprehend some of the time, that self-monitoring meant noticing when there was a word or an idea that you didn't understand, and that this was important because a reader could take action if (s)he was aware of the problem. I told Sam that I would be reading some sentences that didn't make sense and that I was hoping he might be able to figure out what the problem was. He was able to note word difficulties (The man had a *goatee*), as well as idea difficulties that involved a contradiction with his own experience (The boy bought a small toy for $500) and an internal contradiction (The old man was eight years old). However, he couldn't figure out what was confusing about a sentence that was more vague than blatantly problematic (The dogs at Leo's house had always belonged more to his father than anyone else) and insisted that he had never noticed that he didn't understand as he read on his own. The next step was to present sentences (and, ultimately, paragraphs) some of which were problematic and some not. Sam was able to

recognize the meaningful sentences, but often insisted that he understood unclear sentences (such as, The city needs to open a shelter to *hurt* homeless people).

At this point, I introduced the terminology *click* and *clunk* – *click* meaning that the reader fully understood what had been read and *clunk* meaning that there was something getting in the way of understanding. We progressed rather informally from single sentences to paragraphs, but Sam really struggled at this level. It was clear to me that he continued to believe that it was "bad" to admit that he didn't understand, so I started a point system in which he received as much credit for saying he didn't understand and knowing what was causing the problem as he did for understanding and being able to paraphrase what he read. I also modeled in more detail:

> (reading) "Linda is an astronaut on the space shuttle." I would have to say "clunk" because I'm not completely sure that I know what a space shuttle is, OK? So that's an example of how I said clunk and I could tell why. (reading) "She is going to repair the broken telescope." Click – that means she's going up and fixing the telescope. (reading) "As she looks out the window she can see Earth below." So there must be a window in the spaceship and she looks out and she can see Earth. (reading) "She can see towns and rivers and mountains." I'm going to say clunk about that. I mean I get all the words in it but I don't understand how she can see the towns and the rivers and the mountains.

At this point, Sam began to make real progress. This seemed to be due both to the fact that he saw me admitting my own confusion and to gaining as much recognition for knowing what confused him as for avoiding confusion. Soon he was reading longer and longer segments and taking responsibility for letting me know when he didn't understand.

When Explanations Aren't Enough

An environment that cultivates risk-taking is supportive of growth (Rodgers, 2004/2005) and, since it is impossible to anticipate every potential problem area in a lesson, it is necessary to craft productive and positive replies to erroneous or incomplete responses. And, of course, such replies need to take into account the child's own particular personality, as well as where along the path to mastery (s)he is situated. As Gaffney, et al. (2002) note, the most productive initial response is generally silence. The message this conveys to the child is, "Maybe all is not quite right, but you are an intelligent person and I want to give you the opportunity to figure out what the problem is and what to do about it." If the child is unable to detect and correct a decoding or comprehension miscue, there are other categories of options – minimizing, naming, or correcting the problem, and pushing the child to apply more effort to solving it.

In many situations, I encouraged children to worry less about their inability to respond correctly or completely than they might have otherwise been inclined to do and/or emphasized ways in which what they said approached accuracy. Bella didn't know the name for the clear part of eyeglasses and I said, "You'll find that out [as you read]." Ethan couldn't pronounce words like *hammerhead* and *basking* and I suggested that, as long as he knew these were names of sharks, he didn't need to be concerned. When Timmy (who was easily discouraged) struggled to find a misspelling I'd noted in a particular line in his book on lions, I told him, "Just look through, see if you can find it and, if you can't, just move on, OK?" I frequently used words or phrases such as "close," "almost got it," "that's a very good guess," "that's PART of it,"

"[what you said] would make perfect sense," or "I KNEW you knew – it was just a mistake." In this way, the children focused more on what they did well than on their shortcomings.

Over the course of my teaching career, I have come to realize that honest, straightforward communication can produce breakthroughs in children's learning. There were times when this proved to be the best course. When we began our work on self-monitoring, Sam regularly insisted that he understood what he read but, when pushed, could offer no evidence of comprehension. Eventually, I got frustrated with this and said:

> OK, so I'll tell you something that's puzzling me. Each time when you read a page you always say click [meaning that he understood] but then when we go back and look at particular things you sometimes say that you don't know what it means. So why do you say click if there are things you don't understand?

After some back-and-forth, we came to the realization that we had different interpretations of what was important enough to attend to and what was not; this was the beginning of real progress.

During Study Circle, Bella had more difficulty drafting her book than the other students did. It took me a while to figure out what the problems were, but then I was able to name them – and share some responsibility for them – so that she could move on with her work:

> Two things got in your way. One thing is that you wrote some things down [notes] that you didn't understand when you wrote them down. That was part of the problem, OK? Our other problem was that I took some notes for you that you didn't understand but you tried to put them in anyway, OK?

Sometimes when it appeared that a child was not particularly invested in an error, the most efficient response was simply to correct it. Bella interpreted a statement in the text that the lesser panda *resembled* a raccoon as meaning that it *was* a raccoon. I replied, "But that's not a raccoon; it's a lesser panda, right?" While reading a *Cam Jansen and the Mystery of the Stolen Diamonds* (Adler, 1997), Bella believed that witnesses to a robbery were disagreeing with the police about what the perpetrator looked like; I acknowledged that there was disagreement, but noted that the witnesses were, in fact, disagreeing with each other. When we were discussing animal habitats during Study Circle, Paul suggested that a savannah had lots of trees and I told him that, in fact, just the opposite was true.

On other occasions, I nudged students to make a second effort. This sometimes took the form of providing a running start to support self-correction. When Bella read 2000 for 200, I simply said, "Not 2000 but . . ." and she noted her error. While this diminished over time, Sam had a tendency to offer no reply to many questions I asked. One day I asked him why he thought doctors would check astronauts' health before sending them into space, and when he said, "I don't know," I suggested "Well, see if you can think about it." In the small group setting, it was easy for Sam to avoid participation; on a regular basis, I would note that everyone else had offered an idea and that I really wanted to hear from him as well. Bella sometimes struggled to express her ideas in the group. During a Book Circle discussion, Bella stated that she believed the boy in "Slower than the Rest" wanted to keep Charlie the turtle because the turtle could help him. I asked her to expand on her thinking and she replied, "Like I don't know how to explain." I encouraged her to give it her best try and she did.

And When Things Go Well

Crafting responses to student success is of equal importance to mitigating failure. On many occasions, praise or encouragement seemed the most natural response. Sometimes naming the observed behavior in a more neutral way was even more appropriate. And in still other instances, taking advantage of an opportunity to build on success by questioning the child's thinking or requesting elaboration was most beneficial.

As much as I tried to avoid it, I sometimes slipped into non-specific praise during tutorial time. It was so easy to respond with "great job," "good reading today," or "that's really good thinking." Simply verifying the child's statements by repeating what (s)he had said was another low energy response. Generally, I did better. While working on Making Big Words, I noted that Bella not only spelled the word I was asking for but even noted that I was missing a letter she needed. Sometimes it was effort as much as achievement that I noted, telling Ethan, "You did it! That was a rough one, huh? You worked very hard and you figured it out!" In tutorial time, I could depend on our tight, one-on-one connection to supply the context for this type of praise; "great job" actually meant "great job of giving a reason for your prediction" and I suspect both of us understood this implied meaning.

During small group time, I was a party in five distinct one-on-one partnerships, and there were all the peer-to-peer connections as well as the community as a whole to consider. The environment was too complex to rely on implied specifics. I was careful to explain why each of the students had been selected as an "expert" during our Study Circle research time – Bella as "sentence understander," Sam as "pronouncer," and Ethan as "paragraph understander." I publically complimented Ethan for re-reading what he'd written before proceeding on, Sam for his ability to change the notes he'd taken into complete sentences by adding the extra words he needed, and Bella for holding her Wheel of Fortune guess in her mind until it was her turn. During a Book Circle discussion, I acknowledged how brave Sam was for saying what he really thought rather than simply agreeing with everyone else.

Naming intelligent behavior was another approach. This happened several times during my interactions with Bella. One day she was able to figure out the meaning of *entire* and I noted, "You didn't know [it] right away. But you used the beginning of the sentence to figure out that *entire* means the whole thing." While reading *Cam Jansen and the Mystery of the Stolen Diamonds* (Adler, 1997), Bella figured out why some of the characters were angry; I named what she had done: "This is an example of a SMALL inference. All you have to do is take this sentence about bumping and this sentence about angry and figure out that the reason they're angry is because he's bumping into them, right?" Often the children were able to figure things out but needed someone to describe the process they had intuitively employed so that they could use it explicitly in similar situations.

When I felt they were ready, I pushed the children to explain and/or elaborate their thinking. Cam, the main character in the Cam Jansen mystery series gets her nickname from the fact that she has a photographic memory. When she wants to remember something, she says, "Click." In one segment of the story, several bystanders are described in the text. Bella and I had the following conversation:

Bella: I can infer that Cam, she clicks.

Elizabeth: Yeah, why do you think she did that?

Bella: She could memorize it in her brain so she could tell it to somebody?

Elizabeth: And why do you think it might be helpful to her to have pictures in her brain of the people she took pictures of?

Bella: That she could tell the police.

Similarly, Sam predicted that the dead people in a horror story we were reading would come to life. Initially, he didn't respond when asked for a reason for his prediction so I pressed him to draw on his prior experience – "Have you ever seen a movie where dead people come to life? – and he was able to do so. On a smaller scale, Ethan miscued, reading *growl* for *glow* and then self-correcting. I asked him to explain how he had figured out what the word should be; he responded, "Because I knew that word but I pronounced it wrong." Since I mostly stayed out of the content of Book Circle discussions and yet wanted them to think at a high level about what they'd read, this approach was important in that setting as well. Bella mentioned that she noticed something about Tricia in *Thank You, Mr. Falker*, and that she thought the boy in "Slower than the Rest" had picked up the turtle in order to provide a home for it; in both instances I nudged her to explain her thinking. Sam suggested that Julian in "My Very Strange Teeth" would make a lot of money by showing off his special teeth and I asked him why he thought that was a good idea. In all of these instances, success was followed by a challenge that stretched the children beyond where they might have gone naturally.

This chapter describes a model for Tier 3 Response to Intervention that produces the kinds of achievement gains that allow vulnerable readers to catch up with their peers in a relatively short period of time. Each child in this study received about 25 hours of intervention support for each semester they were enrolled (approximately 11 hours in tutorial and 14 in small group) and, over the course of the semester, gained at least one year's reading level (twice what might be expected from an average reader). The structure and content of the intervention were important. In the tutorial setting, the children participated in collaborative goal setting and independent as well as interactive reading that focused on their particular challenges. In the small group, they conducted inquiry projects and exchanged views on shared texts.

Of at least equal importance, however, was the kind of interactions that defined our work together. The children were, I believe, motivated by seeing me as a person who, like them, had both strengths and limitations, and by participation in a supportive learning community. We employed conversational questioning protocols that served to teach them as much about the process of obtaining information as about remembering it. I made every effort to insure that we avoided confusion by employing lesson protocols that were clear and succinct. And, finally, crafting responses to difficulty as well as success was crucial. There was a "we're in this together" atmosphere in both the tutorial and small group settings that positioned all of us as co-learners on the path to the same goal.

In all of the literature available regarding Response to Intervention, I could find not a single description of what the most intense of interventions – Tier 3 – might look like. The focus in this literature is on what assessments are best used to differentiate children in need of this level of assistance from those for whom classroom and small group support should be sufficient, on standardized protocols for small group intervention, and on progress monitoring of gains in achievement. What is missing are detailed descriptions of the kind of individualized

and responsive instruction that can help turn things around for children who need the very best of what we have to offer. This study offers ideas for what that kind of instruction might look like.

Chapter 6: What We Know and What We Need to Know

A defining characteristic of all professions is a deep and abiding interest in those who struggle. Doctors diagnose and treat patients who suffer from a range of ailments. Lawyers assist clients as they wrangle with the legal system. Therapists serve those who seek help as they plumb the depths of their troubled psyches. And ministers provide guidance to believers as they sort out their relationship with a higher power. Teachers are no exception. They support learners for whom academic tasks come less easily than one would hope, with a bit of parenting thrown in for good measure. Within weeks of entering my first classroom, credential in hand, over 30 years ago, I've known that this was my path.

The best professionals focus not only on their clients' challenges, but also on their strengths – the healthy practices they already employ, the years of law-abiding behavior, the psychological storms they've weathered, their committed prayer life. For this reason, it has been the purpose of this study not only to highlight and address the academic struggles of the children with whom I worked, but also their intelligence, tenacity, and good-humor in the face of those struggles.

Finally, proficient professionals consider the broader context within which clients are situated. What is the lifestyle that produced high blood pressure? What are the sociopolitical circumstances that led to a breach with the law? What are the characteristics of the family constellation that birthed depression? What combination of events has brought on a crisis of faith? In short, what is the ecology that causes or exacerbates struggle? For every child whose path to literacy is a bumpy one, there is a complex interaction of factors that contribute to that difficulty.

I will begin this chapter with a discussion of the findings for each of the three children who were participants in this study, noting attributes that might or might not have been predicted from the literature. Then, I'll speak to key elements of the intervention protocol, once again comparing them with research on this subject. Next, I'll look at the ways that elements of the children's literacy ecosystem were affected by the intervention. Finally, I'll speak to study limitations and to implications for theory, practice, and research.

The Children: Expected and Not

Commonalities

As would have been predicted from research on vulnerable reader subtyping (Buly & Valencia, 2002; Rupp & Lesaux, 2006), the children with whom I worked were a heterogeneous group. Despite the fact that they all read at about the same level, their strengths and challenges were distinct, and, for all of them, there was a disconnect between word recognition and understanding of text. Walczyk and Griffith-Ross (2007) note that children who struggle with fluency (like Ethan and, to some extent, Bella) can compensate for this by effectively applying a range of comprehension strategies and, on the other hand, even fluent decoders (like Sam) can fail to comprehend text if they do not understand that this is, in fact, the purpose of reading.

Similarly, the literature suggests that children for whom reading does not come easily have difficulty connecting to books in a significant way (Beers, 1996; Demos & Foshay, 2010). This was true of all three readers at the beginning of the study. Bella insisted that she had favorite books but had little to say about them. After a friend began reading books from the

Ramona series (by Beverly Cleary), she developed an interest in these books, but they were too difficult for her to read independently. It was not until she discovered the *Judy Moody* series that she became, officially, a reader and this was more than seven months after we began working together. Sam was reading *A to Z Mysteries* when we first met and maintained this pattern all through the year; I had the sense, however, that reading these books served more to avoid the hassle of looking for something better than to fuel his interest. Katya read aloud one of the *Scary Stories* books in the fall and one of the *Wayside School* series in the winter, but it was not until he could read these independently in the spring that they really caught his imagination. Ethan had intense interests from the get-go – primarily war history – but there was absolutely nothing at his reading level that could support this interest. By the time he moved in February, he was just beginning to reach the point where he could tackle books that interested him. In all three cases, the children needed to read at a level within about a year of their grade placement before they were able to find books that sustained them.

There was one significant attribute shared by these children that has little support in the research literature and that was their level of engagement. Middle-grade vulnerable readers are commonly described as uninterested or actively resistant (Beers, 1996). While each had his/her moments of frustration, they almost always applied themselves quite happily to the literacy tasks at hand. Bella reveled in the intimacy of our tutorial time, influenced only minimally by the nature of the task I asked her to perform. Sam certainly preferred Wheel of Fortune and independent work time during Study Circle but, despite his anxiety about being away from his classroom, was fully cooperative during our sessions. Unless he was feeling ill, Ethan was engaged by our one-on-one work – especially when I read aloud to him about the Revolutionary or Civil War – and was completely in his element interacting with his peers during small group time.

In addition to these commonalities, each child exhibited particular characteristics that were both similar to and different from those suggested in the literature on struggling readers.

Bella

While I initially saw word recognition as Bella's primary challenge, I soon came to understand that it was only words that were likely not in her oral English vocabulary that posed problems for her. She could apply decoding skills, but if the word was not perfectly phonetic and she had no referent for it in her personal "glossary," she was stuck. Chall, et al. (1990) and others (Ouellette & Beers, 2010; Spear-Swerling, 2010) have found that this predicament is common among older vulnerable readers, especially children of lower socioeconomic status. Mezynski (1983) notes, however, that even without understanding every word meaning, comprehension is possible and this was clearly the case with Bella. By attending closely to all the words she did understand; by re-reading when needed; and by reading aloud, when possible in order to stay fully focused, Bella was able to compensate for any words whose meaning escaped her. Once she learned a range of strategies for ferreting out at least basic meanings for problematic words, she became an even more effective reader.

Most researchers (Nelson & Stage, 2007; Ouellette & Beers, 2010; Ricketts, et al., 2007; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986) do not share Mezynski's confidence in the child's ability to compensate in this manner – the first way in which Bella seemed to defy simple categorization. There were other attributes that stood in contrast to common descriptions of vulnerable readers. First,

while these readers are often portrayed as passive (Johnston & Winograd, 1985), Bella was clearly an active participant in our work, enjoyed challenges, and was always willing to take a risk. During tutorial time, she constantly peppered me with questions about content and process. Long after she reached her goal for quickly reading multi-syllable words, she insisted on repeating the challenge until she read them as quickly as I could have. She was usually the first to volunteer during small group time – wanting to make the first guess for the Wheel of Fortune puzzle of the day, to read aloud the book she'd written in an after school program, and to offer her ideas during Book Circle discussions. While it is generally assumed that high-level comprehension is a greater challenge than understanding at the low-inference level (Cain, et al., 2003), this was not the case for Bella. She was sometimes quite sophisticated in her thinking – referring to a character as "mysterious," a term I would have never thought to use, yet accurate nonetheless. And, of greatest interest to me, Bella was remarkably aware of her own particular strengths and challenges. She noted early on that remembering what she'd read was the easiest part of reading for her, while figuring out the pronunciation and meaning of unknown words was the most difficult. There is no support in the literature I've read for such a high level of awareness and this trait was not shared by the other two children in the study.

Sam

Sam was the archetypical poor comprehender. Probably because his early instruction focused primarily on fluent word recognition – an area of strength for Sam – he effectively employed bottom-up strategies for dealing with text (Coots & Snow, 1980). He was a late-identified vulnerable reader, as are 45% of middle grade readers who struggle (Wanzek, et al., 2010) and, like nearly a third of these late-identified readers (Leach, et al.,2003) his issue was comprehension at all levels. Initially, when asked to retell a story he had read, he looked at me blankly; in addition to not remembering the plot of the story he seemed fully taken aback by the question itself (Ehrlich, 1996), passive in approach to a task that stymied him (Johnston & Winograd, 1985). He had great difficulty distinguishing between more and less important information in expository as well as narrative text and, while generally able to state the topic of a passage, could only rarely explain the most significant idea about that topic conveyed by the passage (Cain & Oakhill, 2009). Even when he grasped low-inference concepts, it was hard for him to integrate details from multiple sentences and infer unstated information (Cain, et al., 2003). Sam was neither aware that what he read did not make sense to him (Oakhill, et al., 2005) nor did he have any expectation that it should (Oakhill & Garmston, 1988). It was all I could do to get Sam to admit that something was confusing for him; it was only by interrupting his reading after each sentence and insisting that he either paraphrase what he had read or tell me what was interfering with his understanding that was able to begin monitoring his comprehension (Bomer, 1999). The kind of regular interruptions that teachers tend to employ with poor decoders, stymieing their progress, were exactly what Sam needed to deter him from allowing the print on the page to pass silently in front of him without registering meaning of any kind.

Sam was, truly, an exemplar for this type of reader. But there were two significant ways in which he diverged from this model. First, despite the fact that he was an English learner, Sam had no more difficulty with academic vocabulary than was common among his classmates. He was more able to detect comprehension breakdown when it was related to the meaning of

a particular word than to a broader idea and he easily learned a variety of strategies for figuring out word meanings from context. Second, the clear implication in the research literature that vulnerable readers need to cultivate an active approach to reading if they are to improve did not seem to be true for Sam. When I first met Sam, he was cooperative but hardly enthusiastic about the tasks we undertook. Given the choice, I'm quite certain that he would have remained in his classroom rather than meeting with me. He was tolerant, but, unlike Bella, did not engage me in conversation any more than was absolutely necessary. And unlike Ethan, he seemed not to have passions of any kind. At first this worried me. But then I began to consider the situation from an alternative perspective. Wouldn't it be wonderful if Sam progressed in reading without any fundamental shift in his personality? Wouldn't it be, in some ways, ideal if we could co-construct lessons that facilitated his development without requiring him to change who he was? And this is, in fact, what happened. Most certainly Sam became more comfortable with me over time and, of greater import, began connecting to his teacher and other children. But he remained an extremely reserved, unassertive child throughout the course of the year – all the while developing as a reader to the point where, by any measure (standardized or otherwise), he was achieving at or above the level of his peers.

Ethan

If Sam was the classic example of the late-identified vulnerable reader, Ethan's difficulties were, most certainly, recognized early.[20] At age nine he continued to miscue on basic sight words such as *could* and *thought*. He had trouble not only with multi-syllable words on the Names Test but also with the much simpler Easy Names Test (Mather, Sammons, & Schwartz, 2006) mispronouncing names such as Bab and Jake. And his fluency at mid-year was a mere 46 words correct per minute, despite the fact that, by this time, he had been placed back in third grade and was reading an easier passage than others of his age. He had been retained in first grade; given that this occurred in a state known for retention due to low reading scores, I suspect that was the impetus for this action. When I first met Ethan, he had no clear sense of his particular strengths and challenges in reading – insisting that small words were easy for him but also failing to acknowledge how effective he was at comprehending text.

Ethan's mother was well-aware of the frustration he felt and this frustration most certainly played a role in his lack of progress in reading. Both Stanovich (1986) and Henson & Gilles (2003) argue that early difficulty can cause, as well as be caused by, a reading disability. Weeks, months, and years of failure take their toll. Every time I witness a child giving up in the face of work that is, simply, too hard, I try to imagine what that experience might be like – especially when it occurs on a daily basis. How many of us would continue to apply ourselves to a task that seems well-nigh impossible, even if everyone around us tells us that it is the single most important skill we can attain? Ethan flat-out hated to read and, unfortunately, this didn't change even as his achievement increased. In September, he told me that the longest amount of time he ever wanted to read was two minutes and by February it was down to one. Books were not a source of sustenance for Ethan, as they are for so many children, nor were they a regular source of information. Ethan's mother told me that he was a nature channel and history channel junky. What motivation was there for him to bother to slog his way through a

[20] I use the term *recognized* intentionally. There was no evidence that, prior to fall of 2010, Ethan had received any specific support for his difficulties.

book when he could fill his desire for knowledge by pushing a button, and watching and listening? On a practical note, what was the likelihood that he could find a book that addressed the sophisticated topics that interested him, even were he to magically read at grade level?

These passions – for animals and history – were, of course, what set Ethan apart. We rarely read about children who, despite literacy challenges, maintain and expand upon deep and abiding interests, and when we do, they tend to be middle-class children with highly educated parents and carefully-crafted learning disability diagnoses. As a result of decades of research that paints poor and working-class families as deficient (Hart & Risley, 1995), we have come to expect that the children of these families will have limited interests. Ethan is walking proof that this need not be true. There may have been a spark of natural engagement, potentially birthed in the school setting, but Ethan's mother was very proud of the knowledge he possessed and most certainly cultivated it.

The Intervention: Expected and Not

As is true of the children involved in this study, there were successful elements of the intervention protocol that could and could not have been predicted from the research literature on tutoring and responsive instruction. I'll look first at aspects of the intervention content and structure, followed by those related to process and interaction.

Content and Structure

It has been my experience that the instruction for children who struggle with reading (especially those designated as learning disabled) is typically fragmented and mechanistic, if not entirely scripted. The reader's specific deficits are determined via standardized assessments (or simply presumed to be related to phonics) and are addressed in piecemeal fashion. Attention to comprehension is rare, as is reading of extended text. Given the rate at which these readers progress (Torgesen, et al., 2003) we should know better.

In fact, we do. Even researchers based in the special education tradition (e.g., Denton & Mathes, 2003; Spear-Swerling, 2010) have come to understand that vulnerable readers benefit most from comprehensive approaches to literacy instruction characterized by considerable time spent in actual reading of a diverse array of texts (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2009). This approach characterized the intervention I provided. While the work we did in tutorial focused on each child's particular needs, the instruction was always provided in the context of real reading. I would teach and model a comprehension strategy, for example, and students would practice that strategy in a narrative or expository text at approximately their instructional level. There was also time for independent reading of a self-selected text. Even for students like Ethan who needed support in areas that are easy to compartmentalize, I was careful to contextualize this work as much as possible and, when I could not, balanced it with more holistic reading tasks.

Allowing students considerable control over the literacy activities in which they engage is also now commonly understood to be a vital factor in their development (Callins, 2006; Morris & Gaffney, 2011; Primeaux, 2000; Triplett, 2004). Nevertheless, children who struggle are less likely to be offered choices of any kind than are their higher-achieving peers (Margalit, 2003). I suppose this is due to the fact that, given that they have fallen behind academically, we worry that they will make the "wrong" choice and waste the valuable time we require to address the many concerns we have about them. But this flies in the face of the particular

motivational needs of these children. Surely children who face great adversity in school require more control over what they do than children for whom everything comes easily? The intervention provided in this research study cultivated the children's ability to choose wisely. They participated in collaborative goal-setting, well-supported in the research literature (Biancarosa, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Putman & Walker, 2010; Stevens, et al., 2001). We discussed their particular strengths and challenges and agreed on which we would first address. Then we planned how we would work on the goal, what the specific target would be, and when we hoped to reach that target. Within the range of books that I believed would support their success, they also selected what they wanted to read, and, as I came to know them better, that range expanded, offering more and more choices. In Study Circle, the children decided on a general topic of research (animals) and a specific sub-topic for their own particular project, whether they wished to work independently or with a partner, how long their book would be, and what pages they wished to illustrate. In Book Circle, they made what may have been their most powerful choice – what they cared enough about in the stories we read to put into the form of a question for their friends to discuss and how they wished to respond to the questions of others.

Because the children were a heterogeneous group and we had a limited amount of time, it was important for us to focus on their particular challenges especially in our one-on-one time. For Bella, the key was word learning strategies that would serve to boost her vocabulary (Hairrell, et al., 2011; Nash & Snowling, 2006). Although others have found it beneficial (Manyak, 2010), Bella did not respond to direct instruction of particular words, even those selected from the books we read together. In truth, such an instructional program might have been successful in the classroom setting where the potential for integration of word learning with a content-area unit as well as the increased likelihood of multiple exposures might have made the difference. In our work, however, Bella benefitted most from learning specific techniques for using context effectively, listed and applied in order from most to least efficient. She learned to try reading ahead to the end of the sentence first, then re-reading from the beginning of the sentence (looking for apposition in both cases). If that didn't work, she would try reading further ahead hoping to grasp the meaning of the larger segment of text even if she didn't fully understand the meaning of the word in question, and finally would consult a source (person or dictionary) if she determined that she could not proceed without significant confusion.

Comprehension strategy instruction was most significant for Sam (Dole, et al., 1996; Johnson-Glenberg, 2000; Roberts, et al., 2008). Sam enjoyed and excelled in math, and the strategy protocol developed by Baumann, et al., (1993) served him well. A rich combination of explanation, modeling, connection to prior knowledge, and gradual release of responsibility, this protocol allowed him to take on control of a given strategy at a slow and steady pace suited to his methodical approach to everything academic. It allowed Sam to, in his teacher's words, experience reading in a math-like context. Even when a particular strategy proved difficult for him – distinguishing more from less important information and self-monitoring being two of the most challenging – he could take it one step at a time and proceed with relative confidence.

Much as he would have preferred to spend long periods of time listening to picture books about the Revolutionary and Civil wars, I believed that it was important to address

Ethan's difficulties with print as well. I wanted very much to get as much "bang for the buck" as possible – to engage in contextualized word study (Ivey & Baker, 2004; Roberts, et al., 2008) that was also very efficient so that we'd have plenty of time for other things. In the end, I selected several sight words that were particularly useful as well as problematic for him, and several words containing long vowel sounds which he could learn and then employ to decode by analogy. I presented them in the form of sentences that he could cut up and rebuild. I also employed the Making Big Words technique (Cunningham & Hall, 1994) to give him practice using letter sounds to encode as well as decode in a game-like format. We allotted about fifteen minutes per session over the course of about eight sessions for this relatively decontextualized work. It was not ideal, and sometimes I wondered if it had any real impact at all, but at least it avoided the common practice of teaching a plethora of phonics rules and applying them in isolation. Ethan's word recognition skills certainly improved but, since we engaged in many other activities, I can't be certain which produced the desired result.

In terms of content and structure, there was one major element of our work together for which I found only isolated support in the struggling reader research and that was inclusion of what might be considered an "enrichment" component (Celani, et al., 2006). There is a relatively limited body of literature on approaches that benefit so-called "gifted" readers, however, and that provided some guidance for what such a program might look like. A summary article by Wood (2008) suggests that activities that cultivate the following behaviors are key:

- Deepening comprehension strategy use;
- Expanding metacognitive processes;
- Encouraging interpretation of texts;
- Fostering an appreciation of multi-cultural literature across multiple genres;
- Providing opportunities for discussion; and
- Allowing for self-selection of reading materials.

It was difficult for me to imagine that these activities would not serve vulnerable readers as well. Lessons on comprehension strategy use were fundamental in the tutorial sessions, even for Ethan who understood most of what he read. Our one-on-one conversations tended to be metacognitive in nature; questions like *How did you know that?* and *What other approach could you try?* were common. I allowed the children to select the books they wanted to read whenever possible and these included texts from a variety of genres and with a range of cultures. Open-ended discussion was at the heart of Book Circle time and the focus was on thinking deeply about character traits and motivation, as well as the way they interacted with each other. On nearly every occasion, the children rose to the challenge of engaging with text in critical and creative ways – much as we expect their higher-achieving peers to do.

Process and Interaction

Research that talks about the interactions between a school-based adult and a vulnerable reader is more sensitive to the affective experience of that reader than is the literature about content and structure. It is within this literature that we begin to see acknowledgment that these children are people as well as students. Noddings (1988), van Manen & Li (2002) and Worthy and her colleagues (2002) are among those who emphasize the importance of instruction provided by a caring, committed adult. I suspect the children

understood that I was committed given the fact that, with a few exceptions, I showed up day after day at our appointed times. I sometimes wondered if they knew how much I cared about them. I was surrounded by volunteers from an on-site tutoring program, many of whom spent a rather large percentage of the time allotted for intervention sharing stories from their personal lives and listening, in turn, to the tales the children had to tell. In comparison, I was a bit of a task master. We bantered a bit as we walked from their classrooms to the space where we worked, but once we sat down, it was pretty much all business. The exception was family news – a sister returning to school or a mother who would be visiting campus, hoping to stop by.

The use of appropriate questioning techniques can also be an effective part of the tutor/tutee interaction so long as an interrogational tone is avoided (Stevens, et al., 2001). This played out in the tutorial sessions by balancing the types of questions asked – everything from word meanings to low-inference facts to critical or creative thoughts, as well as questions about process. The children understood that they were to be askers as well as answerers of questions. They counted on me to respond to a range of queries about what we might do next, where I found the books I brought in, and why I needed to call them by their pseudonyms as we audio- and video-recorded our sessions. I also encouraged them to ask questions relating to what they thought they might learn from an informational text. Questions and answers were an important part of our conversation but our roles were two-sided in nature.

There is some attention in the research literature to ways in which teachers can best respond to what children say and do. Rodgers (2004/2005) emphasizes that creating an environment in which error is expected and even celebrated is key. If children feel that making mistakes is to be avoided at all costs, they are unlikely to take the kind of risks necessary to grow. Gaffney, et al., (2002) and Tharp (1989) assert that the best initial response is a non-response – offering the gift of silence a child may need to collect his/her thoughts and self-correct. When this is not enough, Cole (2002) and O'Connor and Michaels (1993) advocate the use of "primary cues" – that is, concrete cues which are close to the miscue and move the reader quickly forward ("Do you think that E makes an *ee* sound or an *eh* sound?") rather than abstract cues that focus the child's attention on phonics rules ("Do you think that vowel is long or short?") or take his/her attention away from the text altogether ("Remember, we had that word last week?") (Cole, 2002, pp. 118-120). On the flip side, Triplett (2004) and others suggest that celebration of success is equally important.

There were many aspects of our child/teacher interactions that were not discussed in the research literature. The impression given of a caring committed adult was one of unflappable calm and unflagging patience. This was certainly the demeanor I tried for, but some days it just didn't work. There were days when I nearly fell over in amazement at what the children had to say or doubled over with laughter at some oddity of the English language. There were also days when I was less prepared than I should have been, didn't know things the children expected me to know, and expressed frustration when one or more children were disinclined to listen to what I had to say. I'm not sure this was a bad thing, in the end. If I were to be a model of a Literate Person and if I exhibited no personality quirks, what was there for them – in all their delicious quirkiness – to relate to?

And what about the role of community – the tutorial partnership and the small group family – in promoting academic progress for children who struggle? Simply not mentioned. While I certainly didn't plan for this, the use of plural pronouns seemed to symbolize that the children and I were co-conspirators as we worked our ways toward stronger reading. Early on Bella asked if these were the words "we" were going to learn, picking up on this linguistic turn. Our collaboration within the small group setting began on day one with the rules that served to define our little community – *Work hard* and *Be kind* – and it continued through the sharing of the books the children authored and our self-evaluations of Book Circle discussions to sharing of compliments on our last day together.

Finally, while the research literature offered some helpful suggestions for response to both failure and success, these were not as varied and nuanced as those that occurred in our interactions. The former ranged from minimizing the significance of error to naming the problem to simple correction to suggesting the application of additional effort. Response to success ran the gamut from non-specific praise in situations during tutorial where the referent for that praise was clearly implied to specific encouragement in the small group setting where a more vague statement might have been misunderstood to nudging the child to explain her/his reasoning or provide elaboration. The establishment and cultivation of community allowed for these genuine interactions to occur in ways that facilitated both academic and personal growth.

Characteristics of the children involved in this study intersected with the intervention protocols I developed to produce change in many of the intra-ecology connections described in the theoretical framework section of Chapter 1. In many cases, these connections were strengthened and this served to support the children in their literacy development.

Strengthening the Literacy Ecology

The children became more competent and confident readers over the course of the school year. According to the Informal Reading Inventory I used as the primary measure of progress, the three children described here grew over a year for every semester they were involved in the intervention. In addition, they were much more able to explain their thought processes when asked to think aloud during the reading of a fable and, of the two children for whom I had both pre- and post-assessment data on the Metacomprehension Strategies Index, both increased their performance significantly. Improvement on these two measures reflected their growing facility with comprehension strategy use. By June, Sam passed the seventh grade level maze passage and Bella pronounced all the names on the Names Test correctly. Results from the California Standards Test showed that the scores of both children had increased about a level and a half (Sam from Basic to nearly Advanced and Bella from Below Basic to nearly Proficient).

In terms of microsystems, Bella and Sam found series books they could latch onto and both were heading toward a richer variety of books by the end of the summer. When I visited Ethan in February and conveyed the good news about his reading growth, I told him that he was now a skilled enough reader to tackle the books that had been interesting to, but too challenging for, him earlier in the year; it's unclear to me whether he believed me. All of the children were interested in the great majority of the literacy tasks we engaged in. By and large they fit the descriptors offered by Turner & Paris (1995) – encouraging the active construction of meaning, allowing for some amount of student control, and prompting a variety of

responses. Whatever the strengths of their classroom literacy program (and they were many), these tasks and the environment in which they took place allowed for full participation in a way that would have been unlikely to occur in a larger group populated by children who were far more confident in their literacy skills. In terms of relationships with peers, Ethan's were always strong, but membership in our group prompted connections that were more academic in nature. Late in the spring, Bella struck up a friendship with a girl who was more studious than her other friends. Sam remained reserved, but even he requested that I present him with his last goal certificate in front of the other children. The question of changes within the family structure remained largely unanswered in the case of Sam and Ethan. However, Bella seemed to form a stronger bond with the older brother who loved to read long novels and her mother came to see Bella as a child who would frequently rather read than come for dinner. Sam's sense of reserve was evident in his relationship with his teacher, Katya. Every morning she would offer a hug or a handshake and every morning, Sam would request the handshake. It was quite a moment on the day in winter when he accepted a hug – a practice which continued for the remainder of the year and now with his fifth grade teacher as well. While always a bit aloof and business-like in her demeanor, Bella clearly appreciated her teacher Libby, and this relationship appeared to grow and mature as Bella became as connected to books as Libby was. Ethan's feelings for Libby ran deep. He put up a brave front when he transferred to third grade in November but his mother told me how much he missed her and he never seemed to develop a significant relationship with his new teacher. And in February, he was forced to adapt to yet another.

The children reacted differently to the variety of exosystems that influenced them. Bella was a maniac when it came to the district's benchmark tests. She continued to work on them long after the other students had thrown in the towel, reading and re-reading until she wore herself out. While her scores improved some over the course of the year, this rather frantic behavior did not. Sam and Ethan appeared to take the tests in stride – Sam because their formulaic questions seemed to bring out the best in him and Ethan most probably because he allotted them the amount of time and energy he felt they deserved. The teachers said these tests did not provide them with useful information about the children's learning and Ethan's approach may have been the most appropriate. Scripted curriculum was largely out of the picture in this school district by the time I began working with the children. I don't know what kind of primary literacy program Ethan had experienced, but both Bella and Sam attended district schools from early in their careers at a time when Open Court was a cross between the Bible and the California Penal Code. They grew up on decodable texts that made no sense whatsoever and were, for this reason, positioned in opposite ways – Sam with his strong decoding skills as a better reader than he actually was and Bella, a less fluent decoder, as a weaker reader than she actually was. Finally, despite the fact that he breathed heavily and had a rather awkward gate, there was no real indication that Sam suffered from any health issues that regular trips to the doctor would address. Bella and Ethan, on the other hand, were ill off and on (mostly on) throughout the winter. While each received medical attention on at least one occasion, I don't know if either family had health insurance, and I suspect that staying home with a sick child was out of the question since it would have presented a financial burden.

Despite the fact that Bella's family changed residences twice during the year this seemed not to be disruptive and there were no obvious macrosystem changes for either Bella or Sam over the course of the time I worked with them. Both lived with their mothers and fathers, at least one of whom was employed. Ethan's world, on the other hand, seemed to be somewhat chaotic and this increased rather than diminishing over time. He'd moved from another state in time for the beginning of school in September and when his mother's work hours were cut back, she seemed to have no choice but to move back in with her family who lived in a small city about 80 miles away. She told me that she loved Education Without Boundaries but "I didn't want my children to live in a shelter."

While all three children made strong reading progress, I came to see Ethan as more vulnerable than the other two. The instruction I had provided for him was as appropriate and skilled as that of any of the others but, in the end, it was unclear to me that he had made any real connection with books and when I spoke with his mother after the move, there was no evidence that she had plans for the kind of library visits that might have facilitated that connection. And from his point of view no doubt, Ethan had bigger fish to fry. He was in a foreign environment and had to set about establishing relationships with a passel of relatives, a new teacher, and unknown peers. Amidst all this change, it would certainly be tempting to rely on the comfort of the history channel rather than books that frequently stymied him.

Study Limitations

There were a number of limitations to this study. They include the small sample size, the decision to focus on only three of the four students originally enrolled, limited access to families, and the potential conflict between my role as instructor and that of researcher. I'll consider each of these in turn.

This dissertation is a case- and cross-case analysis of three (of four) vulnerable readers selected using what is commonly referred to as *theoretical sampling* (Charmaz, 2006). I wanted to study fourth grade children who, despite their overall and on-going difficulties with reading, had clear strengths as well as challenges. I asked the third grade teachers at Education Without Boundaries to recommend students from their previous year's class who fit that profile and, after some initial interactions with a number of children, selected the four who presented the most extreme examples of the word recognition/ comprehension dichotomy. There was nothing random or even systematic about this process. I searched for unique children and I found them. This most certainly imposes limits to generalizability but, in some ways, that was precisely the point. While we can make some general decisions about the structure and content of intervention, it is important for us to treat each child as an individual. What can be generalized from this study is that, when it comes to generalizing from one vulnerable reader to the next, we do so at great risk. I concluded this study with a profound sense of humility – knowing full well that if I had had the time and energy to include 40 rather than four participants, I would not have been in a position to know any more about how to approach the 41st child than I would the fifth.

Overwhelmed as I was by the vast amount of data I had collected, I made the very practical decision to focus on three of the four children with whom I worked for this dissertation. As time went on, I came to see Timmy as what has been termed a "garden-variety" reader (Stanovich, 1988). While his most severe problem involved comprehension, his

fluency was also weak and a source of great anxiety for him; I came to believe that it was, in part, issues with print that depressed his level of understanding. There were most certainly theoretical reasons for choosing to focus on the other three children since they were purer exemplars of the vulnerable reader subtypes I was most interested in but, to a certain degree, eliminating Timmy from the mix biased the study in the direction of success. Timmy did make considerable progress in a technical sense over the course of the study – nearly two years over the course of the year we worked together. Nevertheless, his sense of himself as a reader failed to stabilize. He could "perform" with me and, to a certain extent with his teacher Ellen, but he remained uncomfortable with classroom literacy tasks and benchmark tests, and other standardized assessments threw him into a frenzy. I suspect that Timmy's somewhat reduced rate of growth relative to the other children with whom I worked was related to the larger number of reading issues he exhibited. There was simply so much more to tackle and his progress suffered as a result. He would have been a good candidate for continued support had I been in the position to provide it.

While I wanted very much to familiarize myself with all the many factors in the children's literacy ecologies, some – primarily the mesosystem of texts, tasks, peers, and school-based adult – received more attention than others. I had some evidence of the impact of various exosystem elements and even if I might have hoped to downplay the effects of debilitating poverty, Ethan's situation made that impossible. Other than relatively brief pre- and post-interviews and the occasional on-site check in, however, I knew far less about the children's families than I would have liked to have known. Ideally, I would have spent time in each child's home, noting the ways in which literacy practices shaped and were shaped by that environment. Initially, I feared that making these visits a part of our agreement would have dissuaded some families from allowing their children to participate. Given unexpected difficulty in finding children with clearly discrepant profiles, it was a risk I chose not to take. I suspect that, once the families came to know and trust me, such visits might have been possible. That I chose not to seek out this opportunity most certainly limits what I can say about the effects of home behaviors on the reading lives of these children – no doubt a key variable in their literacy ecology.

From my dissertation prospectus forward, this study was shaped by my decision to serve as both instructor and researcher. This decision (and the reasoning behind it) parallels that made by Duffy (2001) in her formative study of a summer intervention class she taught for elementary-level struggling readers. She believed that, were such a program to be implemented by classroom teachers, it was important that the "bugs" first be worked out by someone who would be sensitive to both its more and less effective aspects and who could adjust the design in mid-course in response to what she saw. In this way she would generate a "best case scenario" view of the intervention and ultimately come to understand whether this was a route worth pursuing. I shared this belief and this intent. In the end, I feel like I have a good sense of the potential of this intervention when implemented in nearly ideal circumstances. While I could have learned a great deal about the children with whom I worked by observing them as they interacted with another teacher, I believe that it was in engaging with them directly that I was able to probe their thinking in ways that uncovered who they really were as students and as people. Classroom observations allowed me the luxury of

focusing exclusively on the ways in which the children interacted with the content they were studying as well as their teachers and peers.

There is, of course, a down side for this decision as well. There is no doubt that I missed some of the nuances of our interactions because I had to focus on providing instruction as well; this required a shift from "being a so-called participant observer to an especially observant participant (Erickson, 1996, p. 7). Audio- and video-taping of lessons mitigated but did not eliminate this issue. I also so enjoyed planning for and teaching the tutorial and small group sessions that it was always a struggle to get myself to back away from the role of instructor and obtain the necessary distance required to bring some measure of objectivity to the role of researcher. Listening to/viewing the tapes within a few days of each session and keeping a content log of what went on supported both of these roles. It helped me to make decisions about what path to take in ensuing sessions and it allowed me to maintain what Yetta Goodman (personal communication, 2010) refers to as a position of "looking down from above the experience, taking notes and saying – this is my research stance." In the end, there is, of course, the issue of credibility and potential bias. Is it possible to provide an honest account of educational goings-on when one is not only a participant in but, in many ways, the director of those events? Did my commitment to emphasizing the strengths of children who are so often portrayed from a deficit view color what I saw? I suspect it did. It occurs to me, however, that it may not be necessary for each and every researcher of vulnerable readers to assume the same stance and, given the tendency in the literature to emphasize their weaknesses, my work – while not fully balanced in and of itself – may assist in promoting balance in the field as a whole. This view is supported by cultural psychologist Richard Schweder (2003) who notes that "the knowable would be incomplete if seen from any one point of view, incoherent if seen from all points of view at once, and empty if seen from nowhere in particular,"(p. 6) and goes on to assert that, of these options, incompleteness is the preferred choice.

Theoretical Implications

This study was shaped by the theoretical lens I employed and that lens allowed me to see and understand things that I would not have seen, much less understood, without it. This, for me, is the power of theory. I was drawn to Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems framework because, in my experience as a classroom teacher and reading specialist, I had found that a given child's level of literacy achievement and engagement seemed always to be shaped by more than simply the instruction (s)he received. In fact, nothing about the literacy lives of vulnerable readers was simple. I knew there were a whole host of factors that influenced their reading identities – from children's unique personalities to the texts they read to the chaos or stability that characterized their homes. Bronfenbrenner's work encouraged me to think systematically about the way in which these factors had an impact on the children with whom I worked, and on each other. Once I began to approach my research from this stance, aspects of the children's literacy ecology which I might never have taken into account served to highlight patterns in results which would otherwise have seemed random. The most obvious example is the influence of the health care system. As I began to think about all the many exosystem elements that had the potential to influence children's lives, access to health care was among them. During data analysis, I noted the puzzling finding that Bella's non-stop questioning during our tutorial sessions – a behavior that positioned her as an active learner and, I believe,

supported her growth in reading – diminished significantly during the winter. Bella was frequently absent at this time due to illness but, of even greater significance, she was often in school, but not fully "present" in our work together. It was when I connected my thinking about exosystems (and the way in which they differentially affect those who live in poverty) with the data I found that I was able to make sense of what I saw.

I believe this study also serves to stretch Bronfenbrenner's work in a couple of ways. First, it highlights the application of what was originally a theory of child development per se to a specific academic field and to a decidedly pedagogical setting, in which intervention was the goal. The various micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystem elements influence not only the psychological development of a child, but also the literacy development of a reader/writer of any age. This is likely to apply to learning within other academic endeavors, mathematics being chief among them. The study also emphasizes the particular application of this theory for learners who struggle. If the variety of systems connections found among successful students is interesting, for unsuccessful students it is vital. I have argued, in fact, that it is the presence of disruption within the literacy ecology – far more than within-reader factors – that characterizes vulnerable readers. We may attend less fully to these connections when all is well; if we do so as we attempt to serve those who struggle, it is unlikely we will attain the results we hope for. Finally, this study suggests that, while we would do well to be aware of Bronfenbrenner's *developmentally instigative characteristics* – that is, those personal characteristics which draw to the developing person the resources that (s)he needs to move forward – it is best not to overemphasize their power. While Bella and Ethan seemed to embody many of these traits (relationship-seeking, curiosity, agentive behavior, and the ability to manipulate the environment), Sam, who exhibited none of these characteristics, made just as much progress as they did. In truth, I looked forward to my sessions with Bella and Ethan more than I did those with Sam. It felt like pulling teeth much of the time. And yet the work he and I did together was as rich and effective as that with the children who were more extroverted and naturally engaged in our shared tasks. When we meet children like Sam it is our very strong obligation to bring our best selves to the table every day.

Practical Implications

What implications does this study have for work with vulnerable readers? I believe there are several.

Awareness

First of all, it is important that we cultivate an awareness of who these children are as learners. Literacy assessments – particularly those that are defined as "informal" – are a great place to start. I can honestly say that the results of the many standardized tests the children were obliged to take offered no productive instructional information, but the Informal Reading Inventory I employed (and the miscue analysis I conducted with the data I collected) served as a strong foundation for our work together. In the press for educational accountability, I think we sometimes forget the power of listening to a child read. It is crucial for those whose mission it is to serve vulnerable readers to develop what has been called a "diagnostic ear/eye," that is, the ability to hear and see in what children say and do just which aspects of reading come easily for them and which serve as roadblocks. Likewise, it is important for these teachers to familiarize themselves with a range of follow-up assessments that can be used selectively based

on initial IRI information. The maze assessment, for example, alerted me to the fact that, while he struggled with comprehen*sion*, Sam did not with comprehen*ding*; it was difficult for him to retell or summarize what he had read, but he could construct meaning word-by-word and sentence-by-sentence. I was able to save precious time by focusing on his specific need.

Observations are also a key element. While I learned a lot in the moment-to-moment of our tutorial and small group sessions, it was fascinating to see what at times seemed to be a completely different child within the context of his/her classroom. Bella, who talked non-stop when she was with me, was a reluctant participant in the large group; this alerted me to the fact that she could use some reminders from me about how much she knew and how she could share that knowledge with others. While Sam was completely compliant in our sessions together, he could be subtly defiant in his classroom – looking around the room rather than tracking along when Katya read aloud from the Open Court text. Ethan, whose thirst for knowledge was evident in our interactions, much preferred the "naughty boy" identity among his third grade classmates. These observations provided me with an additional window into each child's world.

I can't overemphasize the amount I learned from both the semi-formal interviews and the ongoing informal conversations I had with the children. They described their early literacy experiences, how they liked to spend their spare time, what aspects of reading were easy and difficult for them, what characteristics defined a strong reader, what family members they felt closest to, and how they defined themselves as people. It was from these interactions that I learned that Bella first began to read when her mother bought her flashcards prior to kindergarten, that she loved to play Four Square but disliked chess, that she initially believed that someone who read quickly and smoothly but had trouble comprehending text was a better reader than one who made many mistakes but understood well, and that her mother listened to her read while she cooked dinner. From Sam, I learned that when he looked around the room in class he was thinking about other things but not worrying, that he viewed himself as the "only Asian friend" in his classroom, and that, when he was home alone, he sometimes just sat and waited. Of all the children, Ethan was the least likely, I believe, to tell me what he thought I wanted to hear, and he was completely upfront with me about how much he disliked reading and how sad he'd be to receive a book for a present. If assessments served to provide primarily academic information and observations alerted me to the way the children positioned themselves and were positioned in the classroom context, it was our conversations that filled in the gaps in my knowledge and allowed me to construct a more nuanced view of who they were.

Planning What Can Be Planned For

Given the information we collect, the next step is to plan for instruction in ways that take our awareness of who children are and what they can do into account. I'll use my work with Bella as an example. The IRI results I obtained helped me to select books at her instructional and independent reading level, varying these levels depending on whether we were reading narrative or expository text. They also allowed me a sense of what areas of reading we needed to focus on – in her case, expanding her repertoire of strategies for word learning was a top priority. I learned from my classroom observations that, while Bella was energetic and confident in the tutorial and small group settings, she was less so in a large, more

heterogeneous class, caused, I suspect, by her lack of facility with English. I encouraged her to speak at length about anything relating to our shared work, offered academic sentence frames to support her as she attempted to communicate sophisticated ideas, and provided specific encouragement when she commented during Book Circle discussions. While she was never very talkative within the context of her classroom, by mid-year she happily read her book on coyotes to her friends and by the end of the year participated in a "poetry slam." From our conversations, I knew that, even when we focused on print-related aspects of reading, it was important to contextualize this work so as to reinforce the fact that making meaning was the ultimate goal of reading. In order to practice reading multi-syllable words, we selected a book on a topic that interested her (weather). I read aloud all the "easy" words, leaving the challenging words for her. This allowed her to attend to the message of the text and to maintain momentum as well as gaining practice on an aspect of reading that was challenging for her.

Responsiveness

While it is important to plan carefully for instruction, especially in the case of children for whom reading is a challenge, there is much that cannot be planned for. If we develop plans, fully intending to implement them come hell or high water, we miss rich opportunities to follow a child's lead. This does not mean that if a child tells us that they have just received a new video game for a present we spend ten minutes learning the ins and outs of the game. That would be neither professional nor helpful in the long term. We ask, "What do you like most about it?", listen to the reply (possibly gaining some clue about the child that can be transferred to a learning situation), and move on. The kind of responsiveness to which I refer is what characterizes the kind of teaching I described in the *exploratory instruction* section of the literature review. The key here is that a large proportion of the adult's statements come in response to remarks offered by the child rather than simply in service of a pre-planned agenda. It also means that the teacher is constantly on the lookout for things the child says which may be less than complete or somewhat inarticulate but which include at least a kernel of intelligence; when one of those pops out, the teacher pounces on it – pointing out a level of competence that the child may be unaware of. There is, in these exchanges, a presumption that attending to what the child has to say will enhance rather than detract from the quality of the interaction and will lead the lesson forward to something important and true. And even while focusing on the cognitive aspects of the lesson, it is also crucial to attend to the affective tone. If a child is frustrated (or, for that matter, delighted), there is no point in forging ahead without at least an acknowledgment that this is a small person with feelings as well as thoughts.

These are the practical lessons this study provides: Do all you can to understand what the vulnerable reader is about – socially, and affectively, and cognitively. Take the time to do this well in the beginning and continue to revise this estimation over time. Make plans, whenever possible in collaboration with the child, that are rooted in what you know and what (s)he knows. Use time wisely. Teach intently. And, of possibly greatest importance, keep your eyes and ears open. If you see or hear something unexpected, ask about it. Keep asking until you understand. If there is tension or joy or sleepiness in the room, don't try to pretend that it

doesn't exist. Work with it. Know that what you share with this child is a co-learning community and act as if you believe it.

Research Implications

If someone had told me when I began this dissertation study that, in the end, I would feel I'd just scratched the surface of what there is to learn about middle-grade children who struggle with literacy, I'm not sure I would have had the fortitude to take it on. I suppose that is why advisors are careful not to let that secret out of the bag. Happily, however, I see what lies logically ahead as intriguing rather than enervating. I will speak to four potential lines of research, beginning from a point close to individual children and extending into the policy realm.

First, I am interested in the psychological costs of academic failure, particularly among children slightly older than those who participated in this current project. Bella seemed to connect any difficulties she experienced with her status as an English learner and may have assumed she'd "grow out" of them as she became more proficient with language. Sam was, I suspect, somewhat shaken by a recent awareness that he often didn't understand what he read, but he didn't have to deal with the cumulative impact of years of struggle. Ethan and Timmy, on the other hand, were clearly affected by reading difficulties that began early in their school careers. I saw in Ethan's case, a child who responded to this by avoiding reading whenever he could. Timmy's anxiety, especially in testing situations, was debilitating. In reading the few available in-depth analyses of middle school vulnerable readers (e.g., Hall, 2010), it is evident that they demonstrate an even wider array of negative compensatory behaviors. Why does this surprise us? How many of us would continue to apply concerted effort to mastering something that we'd failed at for years? I am interested in children's affective response to extended periods of difficulty. Work with middle school children who are typically more metacognitively aware might provide additional insights.

Second, there is simply not a large enough bank of vulnerable reader case studies. I can imagine a data base of such studies. Each would contain a clear description of the child's strengths and challenges (academic, personal, and social), the general lesson structure employed in the context of whatever intervention is provided and ways in which it was modified on the basis of the child's unique needs, transcriptions of interactions between the child and the tutor (as well as peers and/or family members, when appropriate), and detailed assessment results. Ideally, studies would be longitudinal in nature, following the children for several years after they "graduated" from support services. This data base would be available to support tutors, reading specialists, and other intervention providers as they make decisions about how the proceed with the children they serve.

Third, it is unusual for a person with 30 years of teaching experience, a reading specialist credential, and three years of doctoral studies to have the luxury of working with four hand-picked vulnerable readers throughout an entire school year. If we hope to serve all the children who would benefit from this level of support, we need to figure out how we can scale-up this model (Elmore, 1996; McGill-Franzen, 2005). There are many options here, of course, but the one that is most interesting to me is the use of community volunteers. I am most encouraged by the work of DiPardo & Schnack (2004) who studied middle school language arts students paired with elderly volunteers. As their mutual trust grew, so did the quality of their

interactions about the books they read together and about life more broadly. These students were not vulnerable readers per se. Nevertheless, I was impressed by the quality of their relationships and I believe this study serves as a model for what might be possible for children for whom reading is a challenge. In a poor neighborhood, like that within which my students lived, there is also the potential to seek out strong community members who would serve as positive role models and who, in addition, might themselves find an outlet for their intelligence and commitment.

Finally, if this study is to be seen as a model for Tier 3 Response to Intervention, what of Tiers 1 and 2? What kind of curriculum and classroom structure (Tier 1) might serve to limit the number of children who need additional assistance, and what type of small group support (Tier 2) might further reduce to a handful the number of children who need one-on-one tutoring? I have begun this work with fourth grade teachers at my research site. They have implemented a program that utilizes poetry as well as narrative and expository texts. For each unit, they begin with a Reading Workshop structure that includes mini-lessons that introduce appropriate reading strategies, practiced in both shared and independent reading time. During this time, the class regularly sets goals related to the content of the strategies addressed (e.g., How many bits of prior knowledge can we, as a group, generate before reading?). In the second half of the unit, they utilize a guided reading format with children continuing to apply these strategies in texts at their instructional level. In the near future, we'll conduct individual assessments using an Informal Reading Inventory. Children who score a year below grade level will attend twice-weekly lessons in small groups – lessons that focus on a particular need (e.g., use of context, thinking at a higher level about text) – and children who are not chosen to attend will be allowed to join in if they feel they would benefit. Classes will disband after several weeks, ensuring a free-flow of children into and out of intervention services, avoiding the common practice of designating a group of "lifers" who are perpetually pulled from their classrooms for dubious reasons. All this work is occurring informally. There is most certainly a need for formal research studies that examine high-quality implementations of Response to Intervention protocols, beginning at a single-grade level and moving upward to school and district levels.

Personal Implications

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the impact this study had on me professionally and personally. Going into the study, I thought I knew a lot about what it meant to be a vulnerable reader and what it meant to do one's best to serve such a reader. That knowledge pales when compared to what these four children taught me. I learned what information was most crucial in planning for our work together. I learned what it means to loosen control over the path that work would take. And I came to understand in a deeper way all the many factors that influence, if not determine, who succeeds in our educational system and who does not.

There were personal changes as well. I learned patience – with student illness, with classroom instruction that did not always fit my vision of rich responsiveness, with the labyrinthine infrastructure of a school district that is most certainly too big for its own good. I learned both to laugh harder and worry more. Something I wrote earlier in this dissertation bears repeating:

Within Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, all connections have the potential to be reciprocal. In speaking of dyadic relationships, he notes that when one member of the dyad changes, the other member is likely to change as well (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). We tend to assume that it is the teacher who facilitates the development of the children in her charge, but, in being present for these children, it is impossible for the skills and persona of that teacher to remain unaltered.

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Appendix A
Data Collection Timetable

Data	September/ October 2010	After 15 tutorial sessions or January/ February 2011	After 30 tutorial sessions	May/June 2011
Classroom Observations	4 one-hour literacy block sessions	2 sessions	2 sessions	2 sessions
Assessments				
• EJIRI[21]	X	X	X	X
• CRI[22]	X			X
• Listening Comprehension Assessment[23]	X			X
• Miscue analysis	X			X
• Think aloud protocol	X		X	X
• Maze	X			X
• MSI[24]	X			X
• Names Test[25] (as needed)	X			X
• Subset of Bookwords (as needed)[26]	X			X
• District Fluency Benchmark Test	X	X		X
• District Comprehension/Writing Mechanics Benchmark Test	X	X		X
Interviews				
• Child (general)	X	X	X	X
• Child (re OCR)				X
• Teacher	X	X		X
• Parent	X			X
Review of Cumulative Files			X	

[21] An Informal Reading Inventory I developed using selections from children's literature.
[22] The Critical Reading Inventory (Applegate, Quinn, & Applegate, 2008).
[23] Alternate passages from the EJIRI.
[24] The Metacomprehension Strategies Index (Schmitt, 1990).
[25] A multi-syllable decoding assessment (Cunningham, 1990).
[26] Bookwords (Eeds, 1985) is a list of the sight vocabulary most commonly found in children's literature.

Appendix B
Assessment Results for Bella

Assessment	September/ October 2010	After 15 tutorial sessions or January/ February 2011	After 30 tutorial sessions	May/June 2011
Informal Reading Inventory (oral reading of short narrative)	3.0	3.5 or higher	5.0	5.5
Critical Reading Inventory (oral reading of longer narrative)	3.0			5.0
Critical Reading Inventory (silent reading of longer narrative)	2.0			2.0
Critical Reading Inventory (oral reading of short expository)	1.0	1.0	2.0	4.0
Informal Listening Inventory (short narrative)	Below grade level			Below grade level
Miscue analysis				
• % of miscues syntactically correct	33%			59%
• % of miscues that maintain meaning at the sentence level	41%			45%
• % of miscues that maintain meaning at the text level	37%			42%
• % of miscues demonstrating sight word issues	32%			22%
• % of miscues demonstrating decoding issues	58%			31%
• % of miscues demonstrating vocabulary issues	9%			48%
Maze (instructional level)	3.5			3.5
Metacomprehension Strategies Index	28%			72%
Names Test	95% of sounds		98%	100%
Sight word assessment	DNA	DNA	DNA	DNA
Benchmark fluency test	80 wcpm	63 wcpm		95 wcpm
Benchmark comprehension/writing mechanics test	Approaching benchmark	Below benchmark		N/A

Appendix C
Assessment Results for Sam

Assessment	September/ October 2010	After 15 tutorial sessions or January/ February 2011	After 30 tutorial sessions	May/June 2011
Informal Reading Inventory (oral reading of short narrative)	3.0	3.5	4.5	5.0
Critical Reading Inventory (oral reading of longer narrative)	2.0			5.0 or higher
Critical Reading Inventory (silent reading of longer narrative)	1.0			5.0
Critical Reading Inventory (oral reading of short expository)	Below 1.0	1.0	2.0	3.0
Informal Listening Inventory (short narrative)	On grade level			Below grade level
Miscue analysis				
• % of miscues syntactically correct	45%			78%
• % of miscues that maintain meaning at the sentence level	68%			72%
• % of miscues that maintain meaning at the text level	68%			72%
• % of miscues demonstrating sight word issues	46%			60%
• % of miscues demonstrating decoding issues	36%			12%
• % of miscues demonstrating vocabulary issues	18%			28%
Maze (instructional level)	4.0 or higher			7.0 or higher
Metacomprehension Strategies Index	28%			52%
Names Test	DNA			DNA
Sight word assessment	DNA			DNA
Benchmark fluency test	83 wcpm	80 wcpm		92 wcpm
Benchmark comprehension/writing mechanics test	Approaching benchmark	Approaching benchmark		N/A

Appendix D
Assessment Results for Ethan[27]

Assessment	September/ October 2010	After 15 tutorial sessions or January/ February 2011	After 30 tutorial sessions	May/June 2011
Informal Reading Inventory (oral reading of short narrative)	1.8	3.25		
Critical Reading Inventory (oral reading of longer narrative)	2.0	N/A		
Critical Reading Inventory (silent reading of longer narrative)	1.0	N/A		
Critical Reading Inventory (oral reading of short expository)	Below 1.0	N/A		
Informal Listening Inventory (short narrative)	At grade level	N/A		
Miscue analysis				
• % of miscues syntactically correct	56%	39%		
• % of miscues that maintain meaning at the sentence level	64%	29%		
• % of miscues that maintain meaning at the text level	53%	29%		
• % of miscues demonstrating sight word issues	38%	63%		
• % of miscues demonstrating decoding issues	61%	37%		
• % of miscues demonstrating vocabulary issues	0%	0%		
Maze (instructional level)	2.0	N/A		
Metacomprehension Strategies Index	40%	N/A		
Names Test	78%	73%		
Sight word assessment	86%			
Benchmark fluency test	70 wcpm	46 wcpm		
Benchmark comprehension/writing mechanics test	Below benchmark	Approaching benchmark		

[27] Ethan moved away in February; I spent about an hour with him later that month but only had time to assess him on the Informal Reading Inventory.

Appendix E

Reader Skill Self-Assessment for _____ Date _____

For each reading skill, write one of the following codes:

S = This is a reading strength for me; I'm very good at it.
OK = This is not really a strength or challenge for me; I'm OK at it.
C = This is a reading challenge for me; I need to get better at this.

Child	**EJ**
____ Reading little words (such as *the, from, were*) correctly and easily	____
____ Using letter sounds to figure out words (such as *plant, story, happen*)	____
____ Using word parts to figure out longer words (such as *everyone, unhappily*)	____
____ Using the words around a word to figure out what it is	____
____ Noticing when I don't understand	____
____ Using "fix-ups" when I get confused (such as reading ahead, slowing down, or re-reading)	____
____ Correcting reading mistakes so the sentence makes sense	____
____ Paying attention to punctuation marks (such as . ? and !)	____
____ Reading at the correct speed – not too fast and not too slowly	____
____ Reading smoothly	____
____ Reading with expression	____
____ Using what I already know to help me understand	____
____ Predicting what may happen in a story and giving a reason for my prediction	____
____ Asking questions about what information might be in an article	____

____ Figuring out the meaning of difficult words ____

____ Making pictures or movies in my mind as I read ____

____ Making connections to my own life as I read ____

____ Getting the topic of an article (1-5 words) ____

____ Getting the main idea of an article (1-2 sentences) ____

____ Answering questions about what information might be in an article or story ____

____ Looking back in an article or story and quickly finding information I didn't remember ____

____ Retelling the most important things that happened in a story in the correct order ____

____ Figuring out ideas that aren't stated in the story ____

____ Stating my opinion about something I've read and giving a reason for my opinion ____

____ Figuring out the author's theme or message ____

____ Questioning the author's message ____

____ Noting voices in the story which are minimized or unheard ____

____ Listening comprehension ____

Appendix F

Strategy Lesson Plan About _____Prediction_____ For _____

Define/describe	A type of guess; a guess about what will happen based on what you already know and giving a reason for your guess; a good prediction is one for which you can give a reason – not just ones that end up being correct
Why important to be a better reader	Predicting gives us a reason to read and to stay focused – in order to find out if our prediction is correct
Model (and, maybe, non-model)	It is December. Wild guess: It will be sunny and 85 degrees. Reason? None. Prediction: It will be cool and rainy. Reason? Time of year, recent days' weather, forecast.
Activate prior experience	Have you ever made a prediction before? Tell about it.
S does with explicit T direction step-by-step	Read the title and cover picture for _____ Think about what will happen and why you think so. Make a prediction. Give a reason. Read to find out. Check your prediction. Hold on to your prediction if it's correct; let it go if it is not. Sentence frame: I predict _____ because _____.
S does with initial hints from T	Think. Predict. Give reason. Read. Check. Hold on or let go.
When to use/not use	Use: Especially before beginning to read and until you get "into" the story. If you begin to lose interest. Not use: When you are fully engaged.
How to know if it's effective	Most of your predictions are correct and/or you are letting go if not.
How to transfer to class/home	Use book mark: see hints above
Independent practice and debrief	