

AMY'S STORY:
AN EXAMINATION OF THE READING PROCESS
OF A LEARNING DISABLED STUDENT

by
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Abstract

This thesis describes a grade eleven female learning disabled student's perceptions of reading and their impact on her reading performance.

A review of the literature provides a perspective on the nature of reading, as well as cognitive and affective factors influencing reading. The view that the reader's goal is to actively construct meaning rather than to acquire a set of skills is pursued. Furthermore, a holistic approach is encouraged, wherein both cognitive and affective factors are taken into consideration when discussing reading.

Qualitative data-gathering techniques were employed. Interviews were video and audio-taped. Student interview responses, questionnaire answers, observations of and discussions with the student during oral readings and think alouds, as well as student journal entries were used to depict and analyze the student's views. The author's field notes of the interviews, the student's permanent record, the mother's interview responses and the author's reflective journal entries allowed for "thicker" descriptions.

The study revealed a discrepancy between the student's views of reading and the actual process of meaning making. She views reading as a performance-based, word-calling exercise, in which meaning making is of secondary importance. The student feels that both her teachers' and her mother's views of reading influenced her own view. The student experiences a constant tension between how she believes she should read and what she feels will actually help her to make meaning.

The student is motivated and hard-working, with a strong support network. According to the literature, these qualities, combined with her knowledge of reading strategies, are all that is required to be a good reader. Yet, she continues to experience difficulty. The study concludes that the student's main difficulty with reading is rooted in her views as to its nature and her consequent reluctance to use the strategies she already knows. It recommends that the nature of reading be afforded greater consideration by both educators and researchers.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Amy.

You are one the most dedicated, energetic, and hard-working persons I have ever met.

Your story is an inspiration to anyone who faces obstacles in life.

Chapter 1

Ramin's Story

In order to introduce the research, I will relate “my story”, providing both my teaching and educational backgrounds, as well as how they influenced the development of my research topic. I have been teaching at Anfield Secondary (the pseudonym used for this study) since my certification as a Social Studies teacher in September of 1989. Although the first two years of my career were spent as a substitute teacher, I had the good fortune of being at Anfield for virtually all of that time. During those years, I held two long-term placements in the Educably Mentally Handicapped (EMH) program and discovered that I enjoyed working in that environment. As a result of those long term placements, I was offered a continuing contract in the Career Education for the Learning Disabled (CELD) program at Anfield, where I am presently working. One of the conditions of my employment was that I enroll in some Special Education courses. It was through these early courses where I first began to explore ways to help my CELD students.

Although my research topic went through several changes, the motivation behind my thesis work remained the same: to help my students to become better readers and to help me to become a better teacher. Throughout my five years in the CELD program, I have noticed that most of the students in the program find reading to be a difficult and frustrating task which they dislike. While I assumed that their dislike of reading was linked to the fact that they were not particularly good at it, I could not be sure that their poor reading ability was the cause. Their dislike could have developed as a result of the self-fulfilling prophecy of attitude disabling ability. I promised myself that as a resource teacher I would do something to help these students to become more successful. I concluded that as reading comprises a large part of high school work, the best way I could help my students was to help them with their reading. At first, I envisioned myself developing a reading program to improve their standing in high

school. However, after researching the literature, I realized that quite a few programs already existed; I could simply adapt one of them to meet the needs of my students.

As I took more courses, I began to think that perhaps the students' reading was affected by their attitudes rather than by their ability. The more I dealt with my students, the more I became convinced that "sticking" them with yet another program would not be the answer. After all, they had been in different "programs" since early in their school career. I thought it likely that they had rarely been asked what was wrong, what they were doing and how they felt about it. Therefore, I thought that if I could find out where they were coming from, perhaps together we could discover ways to change their attitude, and in turn, their performance.

To this end, I decided to combine my interest in student attitudes and feelings, with the reading process. I chose to carry out a case study of one CELD student and relate her story. Through the process of working closely with one student I believed I would gain a better understanding of her perceptions of reading, her feelings and her actual experiences. I hoped that this work with one student might in turn aid me in helping other CELD students. While it is true that no two people are alike and one cannot generalize the findings of one case to the whole population, I hoped to learn from my research and to build upon it or modify the processes used to suit the next student. As well, I hoped that this research would help other teachers in similar situations.

Journal Writing

The act of journal writing has been an important tool in the development of my thesis topic as it has served to cement ideas together for me. I also used a journal throughout my research to record my thoughts and observations. I then used it, along with my student's journal, as data. This heavy reliance on journal writing actually came as a surprise to me for I do not consider myself a "journal person"; yet, upon reflection I realize that the importance of keeping a journal was introduced to me early on in my teaching journey. The following describes the evolution of my journal writing process:

I first experienced journal writing in the Professional Development Program (PDP) at Simon Fraser University in 1988. Since then I have used journal writing intermittently in a few undergraduate and graduate courses. One of my assignments in PDP was to keep a reflective journal throughout my practicum. At first this assignment was an onerous one for me considering the pressure I was under during my practicum. However, by the end of the practicum I could see the benefits of this exercise. The reflective nature of the assignment aided me in analyzing my own actions, thus causing me to improve my subsequent lesson plans. After graduation, I was a substitute teacher for several years and keeping a journal did not seem to be as relevant or necessary.

I started writing journals again after I began to take some courses in Special Education. While I had originally been trained as a Social Studies teacher, I was now working in a Severely Learning Disabled program and enrolled in some courses to learn more about this field. One of my assignments was to keep a journal of experiences in my classroom based on what I was learning at university. Once again, having been "forced" into writing a journal, I found it very useful. However, I did not continue this practice much longer after the course ended. The remaining courses I took in the Special Education Diploma Program did not encourage any form of journal writing. Most of the courses seemed to have a positivist bend to them, such as "assessment of learners", with assessment referring to standardized testing.

I then enrolled in my current Master's Program and it was not until near the end of the program, while taking a research course at Simon Fraser University (SFU), that I was re-introduced to journal writing. Throughout the course, we were encouraged to use a journal to reflect on our teaching practices, our experiences in the course, and to help sort out our research topic. Although I did not look forward to producing copious amounts of journal entries, as a result of my writing, I began to reflect on my teaching practices and how I dealt with my students in specific situations. My writing forced me to view my surroundings in a different light. It helped me become more aware of my actions, as well as those of my students and forced me to think before acting.

Writing in my journal helped me to realize that I have to understand where my students are coming from. One specific entry made me understand the difference between "hearing" and "listening":

One of my students had some trouble in one of his classes with his peer tutor. They are just not getting along together. My colleague said something to me with regard to this situation that made me think about "hearing but not listening". According to my colleague, I have not been listening to my student about his concerns with his peer tutor. At first, I was kind of mad. You know, how dare she tell me that I'm out of touch with one of my students. However, reflecting upon the situation, I think she is right. All year my student has been giving me signals that the tutoring situation wasn't working. All I could hear was that he wasn't doing his work and not listening to why he wasn't doing it. (Course journal, May 31, 1995)

In that case, I was not responding to the student's needs. I was just telling him what I felt was best for him, when it clearly was not working. Through this type of reflection I believe I have become a better listener for and "understander" of my students. As a result I feel I have become more focused on the students and their needs, rather than on what I think may be important for them. Through my reflections I realized that I experienced an almost diametric shift in my thinking since beginning my Master's program. I started from the viewpoint that I would fix the students' problems by implementing a reading program. After the completion of the SFU research course, I realized that I wanted to work with the students to help them understand themselves better and to get them involved in developing any interventions they may need.

I thus re-experienced the benefits that journal writing brought to my teaching; however, the most valuable part of keeping a journal in the SFU research course was to make me realize how my writing could become an integral part of my research. By this time I knew that by recording in journal form, I was forced to reflect on my experiences both as a teacher and as a researcher. This process helped me to achieve the difficult task of articulating my research problem, a task with which I had been struggling throughout my master's program. I used my journal to document the changes I saw in my thinking and the various stages of my research topic development. Writing my ideas on paper made me clarify previously convoluted thoughts.

This idea of teacher as researcher was best articulated by Joe Belanger in the *BC*

Teacher, where he states:

Teachers need to be at the center of educational research, not only because daily immersion in the practical problems of education provides a stream of research questions, but also because research is professionally liberating: it leads professionals to deeper understandings of why they do what they do, and it prompts them to question their assumptions. (1992, p. 6)

"Liberating" is the precise word to use. Knowing that I can take part in research that is useful to me and through which I can improve my own practice and help my students is absolutely liberating.

Development of Thesis Topic

When I first entered the master's program, my goal was to learn more about reading so that I could help my students to become better readers:

...having started working in the Career Education for the Learning Disabled (CELD) program at our school with little background in the field, I would like to have some knowledge that can contribute to the betterment of the program. I feel one way I can achieve this is by becoming a reading "specialist". Many, if not most, of my students detest reading because they are so weak at it. Also, having to read textbooks 90% of the time in school, doesn't help to turn them on to reading. However, I feel that if I can learn about the reading process I could then use this knowledge to help them. After all, when they leave school, knowing the capital of Zimbabwe will not get them a job. Reading an application form, a want ad, or a job manual will. (Course journal, May 17, 1995)

Having only been familiar with quantitative research, my solution was to learn about diagnosis and remediation techniques and then apply them to my students. As a result, my first idea was to develop a reading program to implement at my school - an idea which seemed fairly straightforward at the time. Because I had not yet been exposed to any other research methodologies, I was quite naive about the world of research. I envisioned a typical quantitative study which would involve a pre- and post-test type of experiment. It would be designed to give the students what I thought they needed, whether or not they wanted it.

Although my ideas about the reading program didn't really change during the first two or three courses, my way of looking at research did. "I was only thinking in [terms of]

quantitative methods as I was not really familiar with qualitative ones. However, I did not feel very comfortable with that type of [quantitative] thinking" (Course journal, June 20, 1995). I first noticed myself feeling uncomfortable about quantitative research in my curriculum course. There I learned about transmissional, transactional and transformational curricula. I soon came to identify myself as a "left-wing transactionalist". This way of viewing myself did not sit well with my notion of research as a pre-planned and pre-conceived experiment.

At this point I started to question my plans for implementing a reading program; at least, in the way I had originally anticipated. Up to this point, all of my courses had offered strategies while leaving the student out of the picture. With my "new" view of things, I wanted to look for ways to empower students, rather than to dictate to them. I realized that developing or implementing strategies would not be useful:

...if I couldn't get to the understanding of why kids can't or don't want to read. I could have millions of strategies, but if they don't want to learn [them], they won't. This is a good sign for my research as with every course I seem to be shifting, or focusing more on exactly what I want to do (Course journal, May 31, 1995)

My next course, a mandatory research course for all graduate students, helped to establish my views toward practicing qualitative research. While the course provided a quick overview of both quantitative and qualitative research, it was obvious that both instructors were biased towards the latter. This bias suited my needs as I wanted to learn as much as I could about qualitative research and found that its philosophy matched my own world view more closely. The course helped me to establish my future research methodology, even though my research topic had not yet been teased out. Through my coursework I started to investigate the case study method of doing research:

I think I've got it!!! My idea for a thesis may be here at last. My struggle had been up to now to combine a study which involved reading strategies as well as student feelings toward reading. My solution is to conduct a case study of one of my students, dealing with his/her feelings and attitudes about reading. (Course journal, June 11, 1995)

Along with this shift in my view of research methodology, the focus of what I wanted to investigate began to shift as well. Merely inventing and implementing a reading program no longer seemed to be so important:

The more I think about reading, the more interested I become in the reading relationship. I don't want to merely force some strategies on the students because I'm the "expert". Whatever I do, I must take their feelings and needs into account. Perhaps they already possess the knowledge they need to become better readers, but are not aware of their own "expertise". These are the types of issues I want to explore further. (Course journal, June 20, 1995)

After playing around with the idea of doing a case study of one of my students, my professor's responses to my journal entries in the early part of the SFU research course encouraged me to continue to record my thoughts and dig even deeper. Through the process of my continued journal writing I was able to clarify my ideas. My purpose behind wanting to conduct a case study remained true to my original goal at the start of my master's program: to help students to improve their reading. However, by this time my approach had changed: I wanted to learn about the students' attitudes, feelings and perceptions towards reading, as well as to become more knowledgeable about their reading strategies. I felt that my research would help me to understand the student better, an extremely important and necessary task to undertake before I could begin to individualize a reading program for her. Thus my focus on developing a reading program for the student during the research had waned.

While finishing up the remaining two courses in my master's program, I refined my topic more through on-going discussions with my advisor. Together we decided that I would study one student in depth and relate her story with regard to reading. My purpose for the study was thus to examine reading from the perspective of a secondary school aged learning disabled student. I wanted to have a genuine understanding of her reading experience, her perception of reading and her feelings about reading. However, very little research was available in this area. Therefore, I pursued this course of study both to expand my own understanding and thus, my ability to assist my students, and to contribute to the literature.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

In the field of reading education, there are two general philosophies regarding the purpose of reading. For the reductionists, "proficient reading is regarded as the acquisition of a set of hierarchically ordered skills" and effective reading "is measured by students' mastery of skills" (Haggerty, Hiebert, and Owens, 1989, p. 453). In other words, the proponents of skills-based instruction "dwell on the minutiae of mental operations without considering either the psychological or social contexts within which they occur" (Johnston, 1985, p. 174). On the other hand, the constructivist view of reading involves the "ability to compose text or synthesize the information in several passages to create a point of view" (ibid).

In my opinion, the purpose of reading is to gain meaning from the text. In a study carried out by Tovey, "only fourteen (28%) [of the students] indicated that reading had something to do with meaning" (1985, p. 537). A majority of the students expressed the idea that "word recognition equals reading" (ibid.). I believe it is crucial that teachers have a clear understanding of the purpose of reading in order that they may effectively communicate it to their students as "children's success in learning to read may be strongly influenced by their concepts of what reading is and their expectations about the nature of the task, its difficulty and purpose" (Robinson, Lazarus, and Costello, 1983, p. 12). While Downing states that understanding "Children's thoughts about reading, their notions or conceptions of its purpose and nature" will be crucial in achieving success in reading (1969, p. 217), other research indicates that many children are "unaware that getting meaning is the purpose of reading" (Johns & Ellis, 1976, p. 116). In fact, the bulk of existing research demonstrates that students view reading as merely "a word-calling process in which unknown words should be sounded out" (Johns, 1984, p. 62). Such misconceptions may have grave consequences. According to Downing, "an important symptom among disabled readers was a confusion regarding the nature of the reading task" (cited in Johns & Ellis, 1976, p. 118).

It is not surprising to discover that students' achievement may be affected by their perceptions of reading when many of them are left to confront reading without a clear understanding of what is expected. This state is referred to as "cognitive confusion" (Vernon cited in Robinson et al., 1983, p. 13). "Reading instruction has traditionally consisted of an accumulation of teaching practices based upon logical, commonsense assumptions without regard to the nature of the reading process. Little credence has also been given to the perceptions children have concerning reading and learning to read" (Tovey, 1985, p. 536). These teaching practices need to change. Teachers need to explicitly outline the purpose of reading as constructing meaning and consistently establish expectations of reading for their students. This practice, repeated over time will help to eradicate the students' misconceptions. The students' idea that reading is "about doing workbook pages, saying words, and paying attention to teachers" (Johns, 1984, p. 77), may be replaced with the view that reading involves transacting with the story to make meaning (Rosenblatt, 1978).

The remainder of this literature review examines some aspects of cognition and affect in reading. It is my belief that both of these factors are vital to the process of reading. Although most research has concentrated on cognition, it is encouraging that the importance of affect in reading is now being acknowledged. I advocate a holistic approach and therefore have attempted to present a balanced review of both factors.

For the purpose of this review, cognition refers to thought (McKenna, 1994). Researchers suggest that successful readers are those who employ a variety of strategies in their cognitive processes; good readers generally use more strategies and use them more often than poor readers to achieve comprehension. I will begin with a discussion of the following cognitive strategies: use of prior knowledge, metacomprehension techniques, story grammar awareness (text structure), and the ability to summarize and draw inferences (including self-questioning). I chose these areas because they appeared frequently in the literature related to effective reading.

Prior knowledge has an impact on a student's reading ability. Good readers tend to have a greater amount of prior knowledge which they are able to relate to their text material (Spring, 1985). This ability to activate their prior knowledge is crucial (Ehrlich, Kurtz-Costes, & Loidant, 1993; Recht & Leslie, 1988). In cases where both good and poor readers have the same amount of prior knowledge, poor readers seem unable to activate the knowledge they have, thus negating the utility of their prior knowledge. They may view their prior knowledge as unimportant or irrelevant. In contrast, good readers use their prior knowledge to determine what is important and what is not in a passage (Spring, 1985). Good readers activate their prior knowledge through prediction to help them comprehend, whereas poor readers will need help in activating the prior knowledge (Pressley, Johnston, Symons, McGoldrick & Kurita, 1989). The act of prediction creates a sense of anticipation for the readers. Once created, these expectations direct attention to the relevant parts of the text, in addition to increasing the significance of the text for the readers (Pressley et al., 1989). It is easier for readers to remember the content of text that they find to be important (Lysynchuk, Pressley & Vye, 1990).

Resnick (1984) states that there are 3 types of prior knowledge: 1) specific topic knowledge; 2) general world knowledge; and 3) knowledge of text book organization. Domain or topic specific knowledge refers to the knowledge the reader has about the topic discussed in the text. World knowledge is the understanding of social relationships as well as general knowledge about how the "world" around us operates. This category includes knowledge about "goals, plans, actions and outcomes as well as personal and social conflict" (Resnick, 1984, p. 433-434). Text organizational knowledge refers to readers' understandings of how the text is structured and the benefits of using this structure to help them interact more positively with the text. Good readers seem to be better than poor readers in all three areas.

In terms of general world knowledge, good readers tend to be more experienced than poor readers (Taylor, Wade & Yekovich, 1985). With regard to knowledge of text, good readers are more aware of text structure and organization, and use this knowledge to extract

information from the text more effectively. They use titles, subheadings, pictures and key words in a text to help them comprehend. In contrast, poor readers ignore these clues and attempt to extract information from the text by reading the whole chapter or section.

Metacomprehension may be defined as an awareness and regulation of both understanding and strategies that bring about comprehension (Fitzgerald, 1983). According to Fitzgerald, there are four steps involved in metacomprehension: 1) knowing when you know; 2) knowing what it is you know; 3) knowing what it is you need to know; and 4) knowing useful intervention strategies (that is, how to do something to understand better). The ultimate goal of poor readers would be to learn to realize when they understand what they are reading and to know what to do when they do not.

A characteristic of good readers is that they constantly monitor their progress during reading. As soon as they cease to make meaning from the text, they stop to reassess the situation. That is, in addition to knowing when they know, they also realize when they do not know. Whereas good readers realize their miscomprehension, poor readers tend to deny or ignore this breakdown in meaning and continue with the reading. Once good readers stop, they explore what it is they know, what they need to know and how to attain this knowledge. For example, they may re-read the confusing passage, question themselves about the missing information or skim the text for answers to their questions. In addition, they may use contextual clues from the reading selection, or ask someone for help.

In contrast, poor readers would not likely attempt many of these interventionary strategies, partly because they do not realize when they do not understand (Garner & Reis, 1981). That is, they do not know when a comprehension problem exists. Also, as stated by Fitzgerald (1983), "[m]any poorer readers do not understand the utility of trying other comprehension strategies when their initial efforts have not been successful" (p. 251). Thus, should an attempted corrective strategy fail, poor readers would quite often give up or skip the problem rather than attempt other strategies. Part of their lack of effort stems from a reluctance to take risks (Kletzien, 1991). Whereas good readers would make guesses as an attempt to

make meaning, poor readers perceive resorting to guessing as a negative. Finally, poor readers quite often lack the appropriate "fix-up" strategies to alleviate the situation (Alvermann, 1988).

Story grammar is a set of organizational rules governing most stories. Teaching students about story grammar and the necessary cognitive strategies to make use of this knowledge may lead to improved comprehension (Meyer, Young & Bartlett, 1989; Santa, Havens, Nelson, Danner, Scalf, & Scalf, 1988). The story grammar of a narrative depicts experiences that are related to one's own life experiences, following the same sequences (Graesser, Golding & Long, 1991). That is, people in real life follow certain actions to achieve certain goals which result in certain consequences. The general pattern of story grammar involves the elements of setting, theme, plot and resolution, with specific information about what happens in each section (Gordon & Braun, 1983). This pattern basically follows the pattern of real life. Good readers understand the structure of narrative passages which helps them with comprehension as well as with recall of stories (Lysynchuk et al., 1990). Narratives invite more inference generation, which is one of the necessary elements for comprehension (Graesser et al., 1991). More specifically, "knowledge of the components in a well-organized story may enhance comprehension and recall through inference"(Gordon & Braun, 1983, p.118).

By knowing story structures, readers will have an organizational tool to help them better comprehend and remember when listening to or reading other stories (Meyer, van Dijk & Kintsch cited in Meyer et al., 1989). In addition, good readers understand the causal connection of the narrative elements, whereas poor readers fail to make this important link (Trabasso, Secco & Van Den Broek, 1984). Also, understanding story grammar helps readers become more critical of the selection as they are then able to recognize missing story elements (Santa et al., 1988).

Good readers can synthesize ideas to "get the gist" of the selection (Symons & Pressley, 1993). This ability allows them to delete irrelevant and redundant information (Brown, Day & Jones, 1983). They can mentally identify important ideas (Spring, 1985). On

the other hand, poor readers are not as effective in choosing the most important ideas in the text (Recht & Leslie, 1988). In fact, they seem to be insensitive to the important information in the text (Paris, Wasik & Turner, 1991). This insensitivity may be partially caused by their lack of sufficient background knowledge which prevents them from interacting with the text. Also, poor readers concentrate on individual words or narrow units of words instead of ideas or relations between sentences (Brozo, 1983). In fact, Brozo has conducted studies which have shown that poor readers' comprehension is improved when words are organized into "chunks" or larger meaningful units. As a result of their ability to stay with larger units of thought, good readers are able to maintain the general idea of the text better than poor readers (MacLean & Chapman, 1989).

Good readers check to see if they have understood the message of the author after having read the last word or part of a selection. One method they use to check their own understanding is summarization. Good readers' summarization ability is more sophisticated than that of less-abled readers. Proficient readers summarize according to ideas and topics, without focusing on the order in which the information was presented in the text (Paris et al., 1991). Furthermore, according to Baumann (cited in Paris et al.), poor readers would be more likely to repeat the message verbatim. Good readers would put the meaning in their own words, demonstrating a better grasp of the message.

Taylor found that good readers plan their summarization before writing and use text structure to help them illustrate the important ideas in their own words (cited in Paris et al., 1991). These readers also monitor the text to evaluate their own accuracy as they summarize (Paris et al.). Further, Taylor (cited in Santa et al., 1988) observed that unsuccessful summarizers begin their summaries almost immediately after reading the selection, without any note-taking or underlining.

Poor readers have more difficulty drawing inferences than good readers (Holmes, 1983). Good readers are, in fact, constantly drawing inferences both during and after reading (Andre & Anderson, 1979). In addition, they generate questions during the reading process.

This active participation improves their reading comprehension (Pressley et al., 1989). Being active means that readers become more involved in their own learning and comprehension by engaging in such activities as summarizing, self-questioning, monitoring and using relevant background knowledge (Pearson & Fielding, 1991). Another important aspect of drawing inferences is the use of reasoning strategies. Good readers employ these strategies more often and more successfully than do poor readers (Kavale & Schreiner, 1979). In Kavale and Schreiner's study, above-average readers were also more flexible and capable of using alternative reasoning strategies.

Wilson (1979) discovered that average readers perform better on inferential questions because of their ability to synthesize and organize a response. He further suggested that another factor may be their use of deductive logic (Wilson, 1979). Poor readers use intuitive logic. In other words, they rely on their intuition and use facts from anywhere in the text to answer the question. Good readers, on the other hand, can pick out the pertinent facts related to the question.

The effective use of cognitive strategies is not the only variable that separates good and poor readers. There are a wide range of affective issues that influence students' ability to read. The term "affect" requires clarification as it is used in many forms in the literature. Here, it is used in a general sense, on that Hart suggests many educators share "as a blanket term to describe attitudes, appreciations, tastes and preferences, emotions, feelings, and values" (1989, p. 41).

Although one finds little disagreement as to the role affect plays in reading achievement, a disproportionate amount of research continues to be focused on the cognitive aspect of reading. Athey states "... beyond appearing as a box in the figure depicting the model, affective factors receive little elaboration or explication" (1985, p. 527). Furthermore, according to Johnston (1985), reading researchers have taken a reductionist approach towards the act of reading and have ignored the individual's social and affective factors such as motives, goals, and contexts. We must go beyond the "deficit theory" of reading disability

where the reader is viewed as missing a skill or strategy, and the affective influences are not considered. Influences discussed here include perceptions, social support, attitudes, motivation and emotions.

Perceptions or beliefs held by the reader about herself will influence reading achievement (Shapiro, 1991). In fact, self-perception is an important determinant with regard to any process; how one views oneself has a great effect on one's ability to perform tasks. A tremendous amount of research has been conducted on self-concept and its effects, resulting in theoretical frameworks such as self-efficacy and attribution theory. These theories support the claim that self-concept makes a difference in how one views and behaves in the world.

Schunk defines self-efficacy as "an individual's judgment of his ability to perform given actions" and attribution as "perceived causes of outcomes" (1991, p. 207). Bandura explains that "[t]here is a marked difference between possessing knowledge and skills and being able to use them well under taxing conditions" (1993, p. 119). That is, merely possessing the necessary knowledge and skills does not ensure their effective use. Bandura states that "[p]ersonal accomplishments require not only skills but self-beliefs of efficacy to use them well" (1993, p. 119). Therefore, poor readers may not necessarily lack skills; they may simply not believe in their own abilities or not know how to use the skills already possessed. In fact, it would be difficult for a reader to achieve while fighting their doubts about their own abilities (Bandura, 1993, p. 118).

Research in a variety of fields, including reading and mathematics education (Bandura, 1993), demonstrates that one can make the link between positive self-efficacy and achievement and negative self-efficacy (learned helplessness) and lack of achievement (Bandura, 1993; Athey, 1985; Schunk, 1991). It is not surprising that those with positive self-efficacy would display a good attitude, confidence and persistence (Schunk, 1991), while those who are less sure of themselves and their abilities would give up sooner and be more anxious at the first sign of failure. Also, the more self-efficacious students are likely to discard unproductive strategies than those "plagued by self-doubt" (Bandura, 1993, p. 119). Those who perceive

themselves as competent are more motivated and seek positive situations, avoiding negative ones (Graham, 1991).

Attribution theory is closely related to self-efficacy theory. The latter deals with potential abilities or lack thereof, whereas the former deals with explanations or causes of past events (Graham, 1991). It is the perceived causes of these outcomes that separates the good and poor reader. Overall poor readers, in relation to good readers, have lower self-esteem with regard to reading. This lack of confidence affects their reading and comprehension in detrimental ways. Firstly, they attribute any success they achieve not to themselves, but to external factors such as the teacher or the text (Johnston & Winograd, 1985). Therefore, they feel less empowered in determining their own fate with regard to comprehension. Secondly, such a passive attitude towards reading often leads to an unwillingness to take risks in attempting to read difficult passages (Kletzien, 1991). This unwillingness leads to a lower chance of improvement, which in turn validates the readers' prophecies about their reading ability or lack thereof. Also, when exhibiting such a negative attitude towards reading comprehension, poor readers are less likely to persevere when faced with difficult tasks. Consequently, they tend to give up more easily than good readers. In contrast, good readers start out with a positive and active attitude. When faced with a problem, their reaction is to look for other solutions rather than to give up. Good readers also take control of the situation and exert their control by actively trying different strategies if they do not succeed at first. They expect to succeed and attribute any success to their own ability and effort, factors which they view as internal and under their control. Furthermore, when faced with a new situation, they are not afraid to take risks and guess at meanings or use contextual clues in order to understand the overall meaning.

Another aspect of perception is based on expectancy theory which, according to Rosenthal and Jacobsen (cited in Athey, 1985), involves the perception of others about the individual. The contention is that we, as individuals, will perform to meet the expectations of others. This phenomenon is particularly obvious in the classroom, where the teacher's

expectations, and to some extent those of the reader's peers have a tremendous effect on the individual student. Numerous studies have demonstrated the power --both positive and negative-- of teacher perception (Athey, 1985). In some cases, not only will teacher perceptions about students be strong enough to affect performance, but they can also alter the student's own self-perception (Yochum & Miller, 1993). Written positive comments by teachers can serve to motivate students to become more involved in a given task (Graham, 1991), while frequent comments about student errors or correction of pronunciation during oral reading may affect students in a negative manner (Cothorn & Collins, 1992). In fact, a teacher's emotional reaction is viewed as an important antecedent of perceived personal competence by students (Graham, 1991). Finally, being treated differently than the rest of the class by the teacher affects the student in a negative way (Johnston, 1985).

The social support available to a student, whether perceived or real, is another important affective factor influencing reading. Social support can be defined loosely as the network of friends, parents, and teachers, in addition to other resources available to students. According to Boekaerts (1993), the mere perception of a supportive environment reduces the psychological impact of stress on learning. Thus those students who have a support network are more apt to attempt to complete tasks and take more risks in order to achieve. This theory is especially applicable to school children who, in general, experience more anxiety in academic situations than in daily tasks (Boekaerts, 1993). In Boekaert's 1993 study, she discovered that there was a correlation between students who were satisfied with their support network and a lower frequency of stress in class. Social support was even effective for non-readers in attempting to conceal their lack of reading ability (Johnston, 1985).

Literacy support at home is no doubt a crucial part of establishing a positive environment for learning. Encouraging language development at home by reading to one's children, for example, has been shown to influence literacy behaviors at school (Cothorn & Collins, 1992). Parental participation in their children's education contributes to their children's success. As Bandura states, parents can "... contribute to their children's intellectual

growth in a variety of ways" (1993, p. 143): by helping them with homework and being aware of their academic progress.

Alexander and Filler (1976) define reading attitude as "a system of feelings related to reading which causes the learner to approach or avoid a reading situation" (cited in McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995, p. 934). Reading attitude is perhaps the most important affective factor that influences reading. Without a positive attitude with which to approach the act of reading, one's self-concept and social support system become irrelevant. The first step is to want to engage in the act of reading. The decision not to read a book involves thoughts and feelings about a book, about reading in general or about oneself as a reader, without having to involve cognitive aspects of the mind. According to McKenna (1994), a person can develop beliefs about a process (reading) through direct personal observations (watching friends not enjoy reading), conclusions based on existing beliefs (their own dislike of reading), or information from outside sources (positive or negative remarks about a book or the process).

Cothorn and Collins (1992) report that there is a positive correlation between children's attitude and success in reading. Shapiro (1991) cites several studies which found moderate relationships between attitude and reading achievement. Finally, McKenna (1994) lists a multitude of studies on the relationship of ability to attitude. Attitude is important not only for a reader's current reading ability, but also for the future because an early positive attitude leads to a lifelong reader (Smith, 1990; Cothorn & Collins, 1992). This connection is partly due to the fact that positive attitude correlates to success in reading and although teachers realize the importance of fostering a positive attitude, they do not spend time reinforcing this attribute (Cothorn & Collins, 1992).

While affective factors and cognitive strategies have been discussed as separate entities, it is essential to view the reading process as a combination of both affective and cognitive variables. For example, according to Bandura (1993), motivation is a cognitively-generated process involving affective factors such as self-efficacy and attribution. Therefore, the cognitive decision to engage in the reading process is based on the individual's prior

experiences. Students who have experienced frustration and ascribe their failure to low ability and luck are not likely to be motivated to try harder or even to read again. They will not be motivated to read. In order for one to be motivated to try again, one has to believe that there is some hope of affecting the outcome for the better. Inefficacious students have low aspirations and will not persevere in the face of difficulty. As Graham suggests, "... the classroom is a source of multiple affective experiences with motivational significance, including those feelings associated with achievement success and failure as well as acceptance or rejection by others" (1991, p. 16). Mathewson's (1985) claim that motivation can also affect student reading behavior is linked to this idea. Finally, meaningfulness is important to motivation. As Graham (1992) notes, the focus on the task will be reduced if the activity is not perceived to be meaningful by the student.

Cognitive development and emotional growth occur together (McDonald, 1989). This simultaneous occurrence is important because "emotion is not only anecdotally and phenomenally part of human thought and action; there is now a burgeoning body of evidence that emotional states interact in important ways with traditional cognitive functions" (Mandler, 1989, p.4). Learning activities trigger emotions (Boekaerts, 1993). For example, when a student approaches the cognitive task of reading and realizes that there is a discrepancy between her abilities and the resources required to complete the task, emotions such as fear and anxiety come into play. These emotions -- physiologically manifested as an increased heart rate and perspiration -- then affect the act of reading. Further, Frijda (cited in Boekaerts, 1993) argues that emotions are stored in the memory, along with declarative and procedural knowledge which again illustrates the link between emotions and cognition.

The emotional stress of being a non-reader is as likely to influence the reading process as is a deficiency in reading skills. By the time a student realizes that he is not a reader, and that relying on memory will no longer work, it may be too socially costly to admit to the problem. According to Johnston (1985), asking for help at that point could result in embarrassment. Thus, non-readers begin to employ cover-up strategies to conceal their

difficulties. This phenomenon demonstrates that the problem is not a lack of strategy. In fact, adult illiterates have quite effective strategies. Unfortunately, they use them to "cover up" their inability to read. Therefore, avoidance of print, caused by anxiety, rather than by a lack of abilities or strategies, affects the reading process (Johnston, 1985).

Anxiety can also affect the cognitive process of reading (Johnston, 1985). In task-involved situations (Jagacinski & Nicholls, 1987), people are concerned with improving a certain skill or gaining understanding. In these situations social comparison has little effect on the anxiety level of the learner. However, in ego-involving situations the individual becomes self-conscious about her level of competence. Perceived pressure or the competitiveness of others leads to nervousness and the mind "shuts down". Furthermore, if a greater amount of effort was needed by the individual than by others to achieve the same task, feelings of guilt and embarrassment arise in fear of not measuring up (Jagacinski & Nicholls, 1987).

Unfortunately, classrooms are replete with ego-involving situations which are detrimental to poor readers. We must, therefore, consider the importance of affect, at both the theoretical and practical levels, particularly in the daily activities of the classroom teacher.

Just as reading research needs to address both cognition and affect, when helping students, teachers need to address the thoughts, feelings, and beliefs of their students, as well as their skills and strategies. That is, a holistic approach must be taken. As Boekaerts points out, "... the learner's appraisals of learning situations, taking into account contextual, social, and emotional factors, are quintessential to understand and explain behavior in various learning situations" (1993, p. 150).

In order to help students more effectively using this holistic approach, one must understand the child as a reader (Yochum & Miller, 1993) and be in tune with the student's feelings. Johnston points out that "until we can integrate the depth of human feeling and thinking into our understanding of reading difficulties, we will have only a shadow of an explanation of the problem and ill-directed attempts at solutions" (1985, p. 175). When developing a program, the teacher must fit it to the student (Athey, 1985). In other words,

educators should choose programs based on their suitability to the personalities of the students they service, rather than based on their convenience. This approach cannot be practiced without first getting to know the student.

Finally, it is important to involve the student in all aspects of the reading process (Cothorn & Collins, 1992). Such involvement is possible by making the reading more personally meaningful to the student and involving her in decision-making (Cothorn & Collins, 1992), as well as in the assessment and evaluation of programs (Miller & Yochum, 1991). This involvement makes the student a "stakeholder" in her reading program. As a stakeholder, the student is motivated to spend more time on reading and to share her opinions. By sharing thoughts the teacher can establish a supportive environment which will aid in the development of positive attitudes. In this way, it is possible for the classroom teacher to combine both cognitive and affective factors to positively influence students' reading.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a description of the two general views (reductionist and constructivist) of reading and pursued the view that reading is meaning making. The literature provides evidence that many children are not clear about the goal of meaning making in reading and that this misconception leads to difficulties in their reading development. The remainder of the chapter provided a balanced view on some aspects of the role of cognition and affect in reading. Cognitive strategies such as the use of prior knowledge, metacomprehension techniques, awareness of text book structures and narrative story grammars, and the ability to summarize and draw inferences were discussed. In addition, affective factors such as self-perceptions like self-efficacy, attribution and expectancy theories, the role of support networks and attitudes were examined. It is suggested that the reading process be viewed as a combination of cognitive and affective factors. Therefore, a more holistic approach to understanding the reading process, is recommended, in which teachers involve students as stake-holders. It is the author's belief that the field will benefit from further research carried

out using this approach. Therefore, the following investigation of one student's perceptions of the reading process is perceived to be a valuable addition to the current literature.

Chapter 3

Methodology

I approached this study from a qualitative or naturalistic research perspective, using a single participant case study. One must realize that case study is not a research methodology in that it does not dictate a single method or a particular research paradigm. Instead, it is "a basic design that can accommodate a variety of disciplinary perspectives, as well as philosophical perspectives on the nature of research itself" (Merriam, 1988, p. 3). Thus, case studies are neither limited to a single school of thought nor to a single technique.

My choice of a qualitative perspective was influenced by several factors. Firstly, I subscribe to the tenet of the qualitative paradigm that people are "active agents in constructing and making sense of the realities they encounter" (Filstead, 1979, p. 36). Thus, I fit in with Schulman's description of interpretive scholars who

view classrooms as socially and culturally organized environments. Individual participants in those environments contribute to the organization and to the definition of meanings. They are actively engaged in making sense of the setting. (1986, p. 20)

Secondly, naturalistic inquiry focuses on meaning in context. It is important to set the scene and provide ample description in order to clearly present the context of my research. I will attempt, as Patton writes,

to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting - what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting - and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting. (cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 16)

Finally, I am more interested in understanding and communicating the reading process of one of my students, than in testing hypotheses. This view fits with qualitative inquiry which, as Merriam states, "is inductive - focusing on process, understanding, and interpretation - rather than deductive and experimental" (1988, p. 21).

The main difference between case studies and other research studies as identified by Stake, is that in the former

the case is made the focus of attention not the whole population of cases. In most other studies, researchers generalize beyond particular instances to search for what is common and pervasive. The case study may or may not be an ultimate interest in the generalizable. The search instead is for an understanding of the particular case. (Taped lecture, 1980)

Merriam adds, “[o]ne selects a case study approach because one wishes to understand the particular in depth, not because one wants to know what is generally true of the many” (1988, p. 173).

The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon. Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meaning that expand its readers’ experiences. These insights can be construed as tentative hypotheses that help structure future research; hence, case study plays an important role in advancing a field’s knowledge base. Case study has proved particularly useful for studying educational innovations. (Merriam, 1988, p. 33)

Amy (the pseudonym used for this study) was chosen using purposeful sampling in order to select an “information-rich” participant (Schumacher & McMillan, 1993). Initially, I conducted a series of informal interviews with four students (two males in grade 10 and one male and one female in grade 11), to determine who would provide the most in-depth information for the study, regardless of their feelings about reading. This ratio reflects the general ratio of females to males in the program of different grades. Presently there are 7 girls and 19 boys in the program. I chose older students based on the assumption that they would be better able to verbalize their ideas and opinions. I asked each of these students from the program including Amy, several questions about reading. From this rough sample, I decided to interview Amy further as her answers (more so than any others) seemed to go beyond the surface. For example, when I asked Amy if she perceived reading as useful, she replied that reading was needed to help her after high school in here job, as well as for leisure purposes after work. When I asked the same question of the other students, the typical response was that reading was useful for getting work done in school.

Initial interview questions for the study were chosen from research articles, as well as from my own experience working with Learning Disabled (LD) students. These original questions were divided into three categories: feelings about reading, procedures used when reading, and the nature of reading. At times during the semi-structured interviews, new questions emerged from Amy's responses. I followed up on these "off-topic" conversations and was often rewarded with valuable insight that would otherwise have been missed.

All of the interviews were conducted one-on-one and took place after school. The first interview occurred in the resource room as I thought that Amy would feel most at ease there. Subsequent interviews were conducted in a small office next to the resource room due to better sound quality. I interviewed Amy seven times and her mother once to gather data, then I conducted one follow-up interview with each of them as a form of respondent validation. I did not interview Amy's father, as according to both Amy and her mother, he did not play a significant role in Amy's reading development as did her mother. The data-gathering interviews started on May 15, 1996 and ended on June 20th of the same year. The follow-up interviews were conducted on October 7th and 12th, with Amy and her mother, respectively. Throughout each interview, I paraphrased the respondents' comments to ensure that I was understanding the responses clearly.

The topic of the first interview on May 15th was Amy's feelings regarding reading. My purpose was to elicit how Amy feels about reading in general as well as the emotions she feels during reading. On May 21st, there were several follow-up questions from the first interview, as well as new questions about the methods and processes Amy uses for reading. In the third interview, on May 24th, I pursued the theme of the previous interview a little further. In addition, I asked Amy what she perceives reading to be and what purpose reading serves for her. In the June 4th interview, in addition to follow-up questions from the previous interview, we discussed the importance and relevance of reading for Amy. On June 10th, along with the usual follow-ups, I observed Amy orally read several narrative passages of varying difficulty (see Appendix for a selection of the passages). I asked her about the

mechanics of reading, as well as her feelings before, during, and after the readings, in addition to some comprehension questions. Most of the interview on June 13th consisted of follow-up questions on the nature of reading. In addition, Amy was asked to perform think-alouds on several narrative passages where she was to interrupt her oral reading by saying aloud her thoughts (anything that went through her head while reading). This exercise proved to be quite unsuccessful in eliciting meaningful information as will be explained in the limitations section. On June 19th, after the usual follow-up questions, I again observed Amy orally read several different expository passages and followed the same procedure as in the June 10th interview. Further, the think-aloud exercise was conducted with expository passages. Finally, on June 20th I interviewed Amy's mother (Mrs. Parrish; the pseudonym used for this study) about Amy's history of reading problems, Mrs. Parrish's perception of Amy's problem, and Mrs. Parrish's own perception and meaning of reading. Each of the interviews lasted approximately one hour.

Each interview was audio- and video-taped with the permission of the interviewees. Originally, the video-tape was used merely as a back-up. However, due to a mistake I made in the first interview (I did not turn on the microphone), I had to rely on the video-tape as my sole source when reviewing that interview. To my pleasant surprise, not only was the sound quality of the video-tape good, but it also allowed me to observe Amy's body language and gave me a chance to re-live the interview. Thus I subsequently used the video-tape as the primary source, and the audio-tape as a secondary system.

The interviews comprised the main source of data. Field notes were taken during each interview. Following each interview, I viewed the video-tape of the session and recorded my reactions and observations in a journal. I used the tape counter of the video to reference these notes. Reviewing the sessions in this manner also provided me with an opportunity to formulate additional questions which I then asked at the beginning of the next interview.

At the conclusion of the interviewing process, I entered both my field notes and journal entries into the computer in chronological order. I then reviewed this data, and rearranged it

into categories. In this way, I could analyze my field notes and journal entries for general impressions and common themes. In order to back up the themes with Amy's words, I watched each interview several times and transcribed relevant portions verbatim. Additional data sources were also examined to determine if they corroborated the interview data. Other sources of data included Amy's school records, informal observations of Amy during class time, oral readings and think-alouds. The oral readings and think-alouds followed the formal interviews and were conducted in the usual interview setting as explained previously. As well, I asked Amy to record her reactions to each interview in a journal and complete a questionnaire. In the questionnaire, Amy was asked to answer how she dealt with reading difficulties, how she learnt to read, and what she wanted to do better as a reader (see Appendix for the questionnaire). These reactions could include how she felt about the interview process, what she had learned about her own reading process, and any new realizations she came upon as a result of the interviews. Taken together, the data provide a consistent picture of Amy from which some clear themes emerge.

Respondent validation was carried out with the interviewees to determine whether they found the themes identified to be valid. Due to the importance of validity to those involved in the study, I reported the data collected and the interpretations back to participants as a check for correspondence between their views and my own. According to Ball:

[r]espondent validation rests on the notion that the truth of the researchers' analyses, their validity, can be ascertained by establishing some sort of correspondence between the researchers' and the actors' views of the setting under study. This is done by feeding back to the actors, and seeking their assent to, the researchers' judgments and interpretation.... Not only does it provide intrinsic support for the researchers' accounts (if the actors recognize it as valid), but in addition the technique generates further data. (1988, p. 508)

Following this process, the data was entered into the computer and amalgamated with the corresponding sections of my field notes and journal entries. Once entered into the computer, the common themes and ideas were pursued and the data was categorized into different sections to begin the write-up of the study.

Limitations

Amy seemed to be nervous during the first interviews, as though she wasn't quite sure of my motives and didn't know what was going to happen. I noticed that Amy's initial responses were what I refer to as "what I should say" (WISS) answers. Such responses--fairly typical in interviews until a level of comfort and trust has been established--reflect what the respondent believes she ought to do or say, rather than what she actually does or thinks.

For example, Amy talked about liking to read, yet in an early interview she admitted she doesn't read very much either at home or at school. The interview was carried out in late spring but the last time Amy had read of her own accord was in September of the previous year. When asked if there was a time when she had read more, Amy answered that before grade nine, "I read a lot" (Interview, May 21); by "a lot" she meant two books in about half a year (Interview, May 21). When asked if she missed reading, she replied that reading "wasn't a big factor... sometimes I have enough of reading" (Interview, May 21). These comments do not add up to someone who likes to read; they sound like someone who is trying to give the "correct" answer or someone who thinks they should be reading more than they actually do. When I asked Amy how important reading was to her, she initially gave me her standard WISS answer by saying how important reading was for learning and getting good marks. However, when I probed her by asking if she saw reading as being useful, she answered "No". She feels that reading isn't that useful to her at the present time; it is something she tolerates to get by in school. Similarly, while Amy defined reading as "learning and pleasure, leisure" (Interview, May 15) and claimed to feel "proud relaxed and comfortable" (Interview, May 15) when reading at home, further probing revealed that, in fact, she chose to spend her leisure time at home watching television as it was "easier than reading" (Interview, May 15).

My impression was that Amy's initial answers were superficial; there was something behind her answers that she was not yet sharing with me. Fortunately, as Amy had known me for four years, we were able to establish the trust and comfort level she needed for the interviews fairly quickly. By the third interview, Amy began to respond to my questions in a

deeper and more honest manner. She started to tell me how she felt, rather than telling me what she thought I wanted to hear. In the initial interviews, when I asked her how she felt when the teacher corrected her oral reading, she would respond by simply saying that it wasn't a problem. However, in later interviews, she felt comfortable enough to provide more honest answers such as "I just get embarrassed or nervous" (Interview, May 24). In all fairness to Amy, sometimes her responses were confused because she did not understand the questions. I remedied this problem by giving her concrete examples of what I was asking. For example, I wanted to know if she was willing to read aloud for me because I was the resource teacher or because she trusted me as a person. When Amy indicated that she did not understand the question, I asked her specifically if it was "because of my position" that she read to me. Her response was "It's just the person, not the position" (Interview, June 18).

Another problem I encountered was that the think-aloud procedure was not successful in eliciting Amy's thoughts while reading orally to me. I believe Amy had problems with the novelty and abstractness of this method. It was obvious that she was not comfortable with this method, as she seemed nervous and a little self-conscious on the video. Part of the problem was that she didn't really know what to do despite my instructions. I merely instructed her to stop and share her thoughts and feelings as she read aloud from a passage. The stumbling block in this activity was that Amy's main goal in oral reading is to read without losing the flow, and to complete it as quickly as possible. However, a think-aloud prevents her from accomplishing both of those goals. An excerpt from an interview illustrates this dilemma:

R: You did some talking.

A: Not much (laughs).

R: Does that mean that there was nothing going on sort of parallel to the reading?

A: I wasn't really thinking about anything. It wasn't that big of a deal ... Well I felt I should stop because I was screwing up. It wasn't flowing.
(June 13)

As well, Amy confirmed this idea in her journal. She wrote, "I thought what we did today was weird because I had to say what I was thinking when reading, I felt it was kinda

hard cause it would break my concentration every time I said my thoughts (sic.)" (Amy's Journal, June 14). Amy had to concentrate so much on pronouncing the actual text that she did not have any resources to explain her abstract thought processes. I should have chosen an easier selection for her so that she could focus more on her thoughts and less on her performance of the oral reading.

In addition, this method of extracting thought processes is really difficult, as I found out when I tried it myself. I realized, after watching the video, that my instructions were not methodical and were rather "wishy washy". In hindsight, I should have gone through an example with her to demonstrate the procedure, in addition to providing an explanation. I did not provide an example as I was afraid of coaching her into answers she thought she should give. I perceived this to be a possibility based on her tendency to provide WISS answers in the earlier interviews.

I encountered a similar problem with Amy's journals, although not to the same degree. I found that my instructions to Amy regarding her journals were not as clear as they could have been. Again, I started out by giving her vague examples as to what she could record in her journals to avoid influencing her writing. As a result, some of her entries were rather superficial as she wasn't too sure of what to write. This problematic situation was somewhat improved through Amy's initiative; that is, at the beginning of one of the interviews, she asked for clarification about what to write in her journal.

Despite these limitations, all of the data contributed to my understandings of Amy. Taken together, the data provided a rich picture of Amy and her reading over time, with a focus on her current conceptions of and feelings toward reading.

Setting

The school in which I conducted my research is situated in a low to middle socioeconomic region of a Vancouver suburb. This 900 student facility actually supports a population of 1500 students, using over twenty portables. The research participant -- Amy

Parrish, a seventeen year old, grade eleven student -- is part of the Career Education for the Learning Disabled (CELD) program. Entry into this program is based on test results from district psycho-educational assessments, and requires parental approval.

The CELD program is staffed by two full-time teachers (myself and a colleague) and one teaching assistant. My role in the program is to act as a curriculum generalist, to assist students in different subjects; as a pseudo-counselor for contacting, advising, and reporting to parents about their child's progress; and as a "consultant" with regular classroom teachers to make curricular modifications and to offer suggestions about effective learning strategies for CELD students.

All 26 students in the CELD program participate in a tutorial every other day and are integrated into regular classrooms for all other subjects (e.g., English, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies). Presently, students work on homework or assignments from their regular classes during tutorials. The first fifteen minutes of every tutorial is used for silent reading. Students are asked to bring their own books, provided that their chosen book is at an appropriate reading level. Student reading levels are recorded in their files from previous testing. I also carry out spot checks to determine if the book they have chosen is appropriate for their reading ability by asking students to read aloud two or three passages from their book. Some low-vocabulary, high-interest novels are provided for those students without their own reading material. Apart from this silent reading activity, no other time is set aside for the students to practice their reading or to work on compensatory reading strategies during tutorials.

Chapter 4

Amy's Story

Amy's School Background

At the time of the interviews, Amy was a seventeen year old, severely learning disabled student in grade eleven. In order to give the reader a more complete picture of her, the following summary from her education file is provided. Amy first began experiencing problems in grade one at a French Immersion school in Ontario. Amy's parents were initially advised that her difficulties were due to a hearing problem. She was taken out of the French Immersion school in an attempt to improve her learning situation. Unfortunately, according to her mother this move was a double blow to Amy as she had to attend a new school, in addition to changing to an English program. By grade two Amy started to notice that she was behind her classmates in reading development and her frustration increased. At the end of that school year the family moved to British Columbia where she repeated grade two in a two/three split and then went on to grade three in a three/four split.

Amy's mother recalls that by grade three, where the reading instruction appeared to be more whole language than phonics-based, Amy had fallen significantly behind. A teacher in Amy's school helped by tutoring her in reading twice a week after school for that year. At home, her parents, mostly her mother, worked with her to improve her reading. Her father used flash cards, while her mother read to her constantly and encouraged her to write in many formats including journals, letters and shopping lists. But, Amy's parents and teachers were still concerned. A memo from one teacher to another states, "Can you put this is as urgent -- mother says Amy is not reading at home -- at all!" (teacher correspondence, grade three). Further, a School Based Team referral noted that, "Amy was tested by the reading teacher. Low results. This is contrary to her work in the classroom. Verification needed" (grade three). The Learning Assistance (LA) teacher had concerns about Amy's inability to gain

meaning while reading. She reported that Amy would read on even if she was unable to understand. In addition Amy was "still dealing with the mechanics of print therefore the meaning [was] affected" (LA report, October 31, 1988). This problem was again noted later in the same school year: "Amy is not proficient in decoding unfamiliar vocabulary... Until she is able to do this, ... her level of understanding a story will ... be affected, for little mental energy is left to deal with meaning" (LA Reading Report, March 1989). This problem continues to exist for Amy even today.

Near the end of grade three, Amy was assessed by a school psychologist. The results indicated that she had a relative weakness in short-term memory and that she possessed weak phonics skills. According to the report, Amy still tended "to use a 'best guess' approach based on minimal graphic cues. She [had] particular difficulties with multi-syllable words where she tend[ed] to omit syllables and transpose sounds among syllables." (Psychologist's Report, 1989, p.3) According to the report, even though she was able to use context in easier passages to gain meaning, "it was apparent that reading is a very frustrating activity for her" (ibid). In addition, Amy was having problems spelling. At that time it was recommended that Amy be monitored for the next school year to determine if she should be placed in the Severely Learning Disabled (SLD) Program.

In the final LA Report for her grade three year Amy was promoted to grade four for "social versus achievement reasons" (Pupil Referral for Reading Underachievement, June 1989). By grade four Amy's reading instruction was changed to a phonics-based one and although her mother noticed some improvement, she was also becoming frustrated. By this time, Amy's mother had to read many of Amy's assignments to her. Despite these frustrations, Amy's grade four teacher reported that, "Amy is serious about her work and does her best always" (Grade four report file). It was then decided that Amy would enter the SLD program. Unfortunately, despite the support provided in the resource room, grade five proved to be Amy's least successful year in school. Her mother believes Amy's poor performance was partly due to the use of the packaged reading kits where students were expected to work

independently. Amy's Individual Educational Plan (IEP) stated that her reading needed to be improved in the areas of decoding and comprehension. It further stated that raising her self-esteem should be a goal for Amy: "We want students to take chances and believe in themselves ... see that it's O.K. to be wrong" (IEP, grade five). Her hard working nature and good work habits continued to be reported as strengths (IEP, grade five). Amy was then bumped up to grade seven to stay in an age appropriate class, partly because she was physically larger than the other grade six students.

Grade seven was a great year for Amy. According to her mother, Amy's classroom teacher that year treated all students with respect and dignity and Amy was encouraged to work more independently. This encouragement worked well as her grade seven SLD teacher commented, "Amy is an independent, hard working student who displays excellent work habits" (June 1992). Her classroom teacher noted that Amy did not want to appear to be different from her classmates. "She likes to 'fit in' which is why she is trying very hard to keep up with the core curriculum" (Grade seven report file). Being like everyone else was so important to Amy that, when given the choice of alternative assignments, she opted for the regular ones despite their higher level of difficulty (Grade seven report file).

Amy started her grade eight year by attending Anfield Secondary School in September of 1992 and has been working in the Career Education for the Learning Disabled (CELD) program since then. Amy's high school career started off with a bang. She did very well in grade eight, making the honor roll with not too much difficulty. According to Amy, in grade nine, she again started to notice a gap between her own academic abilities and that of her friends; it seemed that she had to work twice as hard. However, she was able to keep up as a result of her extremely good work ethic, combined with a supportive family and group of friends. Her success continued in grade ten. On the basis of academic achievement, teacher references and an interview, she was selected to enroll in the Science Co-op program. Amy still managed to maintain her honor roll status. In fact, throughout her junior high school years, she had a grade point average of over 3.2. In grade eleven, she just missed the honor

roll, due to problems in her mathematics course. Even though she failed that course, Amy still received a 2.778 cumulative grade point average. She is repeating Math 11 in grade twelve as she requires that course for entrance into a nursing program, her intended career goal. Amy is quite a unique student in that, despite her learning disabilities, she is managing to excel in academic classes. Traditionally, students in our program have a great deal of difficulty dealing with the academic subjects in high school. Amy is performing well in a milieu where a tremendous amount of difficult reading is required. Amy will be enrolled in grade twelve for the 1996/97 school year.

Present Day

Nature of reading

Amy's ideas as to the nature of reading shape her every reading experience, a fact that arose repeatedly throughout the interviews. Amy seems to hold some contradictory beliefs as to the purpose of reading, which results in a sense of confusion and guilt for her. Amy believes that the most important element of reading is to read every single word from the beginning of the selection, book or assignment through to the very end and --in the case of oral reading-- to pronounce each word perfectly. She refers to this definition as "reading reading", "intense reading" or "total reading" (Interview, June 10). Anything less, such as skimming or scanning titles, is not considered to be reading in her eyes and is consequently not valued.

R: Do you classify skimming as reading?

A: Skimming? Yeah 'cause you have, you're kind of, you read glimpses of words right?

R: Do you consider using titles and heading as reading?

A: Like just reading reading? ...

R: See that's where it comes to what your definition of reading is, that's what I'm try to get at.

A: Not really a title I mean you're still reading it but it's not reading reading. Well reading is kind of everything.

R: Including skimming and titles?

A: Yeah but it's just not the big main reading reading. Like reading a story, that would be reading but I mean you're still reading to see the title and stuff but it's not, I don't consider it total intense reading. (Interview, June 10)

Although comprehension is not emphasized in this definition of reading at all, Amy criticizes short-cut reading strategies because she has been led to believe that they limit comprehension.

R: Would skimming be classified as reading reading?

A: No 'cause maybe they miss out *some* things. Maybe they didn't get *all* of it 'cause when you're skimming you're basically going really fast. So you might not get *as* much out of it but still you understand bits and maybe the other person gets an A and you get a B, right?

R: What if both the skimmer and the reader reader got the exact same mark?

A: I don't know, I just don't consider it reading reading.

R: Would teachers consider the skimmer to be somehow cheating the system

A: This is what I think, right?

R: Absolutely

A: Um I don't know. That's a good question but I think so. I don't know 'cause I guess from what I think

R: So they would consider it kind of ...

A: cheating [nods emphatically] (Interview, June 13)

Amy believes that using short cut strategies such as skimming is a sign of failure as a reader. Thus, she is hesitant to admit to having skimmed through reading material she has read for her own enjoyment: "I've done it before just a bit, only once or something. Nothing like each book I [start reading it by] go[ing] right to the back" (Interview, June 4). For textbooks, she admits to skimming all the time, but she doesn't feel good about it.

I skim a lot too and, I don't know, I think that I should be doing the full length, going the extra half. ... I don't grasp all of it, I just try to go the easy cheating way. ... I feel I should be reading through the whole thing so then I can get *everything*. ... Feeling kind of guilty that I didn't read everything but I don't know why. (Interview, June 13)

It is surprising that Amy will not accept that skimming can be a useful reading strategy, particularly as she experiences success with it! She admits that she achieves better marks when she skims in order to answer questions for her course assignments. When questioned as to what happens when she tries to cover everything in an assigned reading task, Amy replies:

A: It kind of blows up in my face.

R: And when you just go for the chunks [skimming] what is the result?

A: Better which doesn't make sense but that's O.K. So that's what I do now but I still wish I had read everything.

R: Even though you tried going for the everything method and you got lower marks than when you did the chunk method?

A: I probably gained more from it ... more information [when reading it all].

R: Where does that conclusion come from that you get more?

A: It's just me ... It's just a belief... Well maybe it's from some of my friends. They always read the whole thing and they end up having A's.

R: And you read the whole thing and you ...

A: Probably fail it. Most of the time I fail them.

R: When you read the whole thing?

A: Yeah. Interview, (Interview, June 13)

When she does use skimming to get the answers for her assignments, Amy feels that she is doing something wrong,

I probably don't even read it most of the time. I just do the questions only. ... I'd classify it as wrong because you probably don't get as much information. There's [sic] probably why I don't do good on tests as much (Interview, June 4)

She felt that she had to read the whole passage so as not to miss anything. When asked if teachers would test her on everything, she replied, "No, but I still feel I should read all of it" (Interview, June 13). Thus, even though Amy comprehends material much better when she

uses short-cut reading techniques and consequently receives better marks, she limits her use of such techniques. As short-cut techniques run counter to her idea of "total reading", she views herself as a bad reader and feels guilty when she skims through material.

Amy hasn't personalized her own strategies for effective reading. That is, she copies the strategies of people she thinks are good readers, even though different strategies may be more appropriate for her. She does not realize that different people need different strategies to attain the same goal of making meaning. Amy illustrates this point when she discusses strategies used by her friend Betty (the pseudonym used for this study),

...so I guess that might be somehow related, that [Betty] reads everything so maybe I should read everything to get that 'A'. Even though it doesn't work every time but you know it's your effort that counts so maybe I didn't put that much effort into it. (Interview, June 13)

Even when both Amy and Betty use the same strategy, for example looking up a word in the dictionary, Amy still de-values her attempt.

A: But that's my last resort, right? That's probably her first pick... I guess it's not as good because I don't like to look it up in the dictionary and maybe she just goes directly to it. ... She can do it all by herself. ... Well I guess I could do it myself too but I just don't go that extra foot.

R: Why?

A: Probably 'cause I'm lazy. I don't care too much but yet I want to learn.

R: Is it she's a better reader because she's not lazy?

A: Maybe. Maybe she reads it from A to B. (Interview, June 13)

Once again Amy's concept of total reading surfaced; her main goal it seems is not to make meaning but to read straight through "from A to B". It is interesting that even though Betty does not have a learning disability, her marks are lower than Amy's. Yet, Amy feels inadequate when compared with Betty. If Amy does different things than Betty, or in a different order, she feels that somehow they are not as valuable or worthwhile. Amy even went so far as to call herself "lazy" because she, unlike Betty, does not use a dictionary as her first strategy when encountering a word she does not understand.

When adopting Betty's approach to reading fails to improve her ability or her marks, Amy assumes that she has done something wrong. Amy simply attributes this failure to a lack of effort on her part, rather than to an incorrect choice of strategy. Amy thinks that if she does not do all of the reading, she is not putting in a 100% effort. Employing one or more of a variety of different strategies is logical if one's concept of reading is to make meaning. In that case, it is unimportant how one gets there. However, if one's concept of reading is to cover every word from point "A" to point "B", then no other strategies are acceptable. It is clear that Amy's view of the nature of reading encompasses the latter:

R: But there's something inside you that says you have to read all of it or it's not good enough.

A: Right. [nods]

R: I'm trying to be careful not to put words in your mouth.

A: No that's right. (Interview, June 13)

Oddly enough, while Amy attributes her academic success to hard work and motivation, the opposite applies to reading. Due to her lack of success in reading thus far, she blames her lack of effort on her "laziness" and her lack of motivation on her label. She says, "My label prevented me from trying"(Interview, June 10), or "why bother trying"(Interview, June 10). This last statement is amazing coming from a student who has achieved tremendous feats based largely on effort and attitude. In a journal entry, Amy reaches out to me for help. "...But I was thing [thinking] if you had some way of coming up with something to make me read anything then I think I'd put my full effort, because reading is so important because it's all round us" (Amy's Journal, June 4). She states that she should be putting in more effort than she does currently, but she feels her effort alone is not enough. She is asking for something to help her and that would encourage her to try again and try harder. For academics she takes on the qualities of a "good reader" and attributes her success to her own ability and effort. However, when it comes to reading, she exhibits "poor reader" qualities, by believing that factors beyond her control are responsible for her lack of reading achievements.

Influences

Amy believes this view of reading has been instilled in her by both her teachers and her mother. Although her teachers have not explicitly told her that she must read everything, she interpreted their instructions as such. "Teachers they expect you to read from point A to point B so then there's not exceptions" (Interview, June 13). When the teacher said read pages one to ten and do the questions, Amy assumed they meant she had to read all of the words on all of the pages (Interview, June 18). Similarly, while Amy's mother did not explicitly tell her that she should read every page, she implicitly communicated this belief to Amy.

R: Where did that belief come from?

A: It might have been from my parents. [pause] Well maybe it's just from my mother. 'Cause of the way she used to read to me from textbooks and stuff. It was from A to B. ... I guess my mother kind of told me you have to read all of it to get all of it.... My mother wants you to do everything. She wants it done perfectly basically. She wants you to put all your effort into it and [sigh] somehow it comes out in reading, I guess. (Interview, June 13)

We returned to the same topic during the June 18th interview,

"Probably [I learned it] from my mother because she pushes me to do everything all the way through with all my effort so then that technically would be all the effort that you put into it ... If I skimmed it would be like I didn't put that 100% in."

After having interviewed Amy's mother, I realized how much Amy is influenced and inspired by her mother. According to Mrs. Parrish, reading "is sitting down and opening a book and losing myself" (Interview, June 20). This view appears to have taken root when she was a young girl and her aunt gave her a book and told her to "sit there till you've finished it" (Interview, June 20). Mrs. Parrish believes that the proper way to read is by "reading reading" as opposed to skimming. She doesn't "... want to miss any of the subtleties" (Interview, June 20). Not surprisingly, she would consider Amy to be losing out or cheated if she used "reading tricks" to get meaning. She believes that Amy would miss important details if she used skimming. Similarly, when asked about leaving out details in a passage, Mrs. Parrish replied that she wouldn't because, "I don't want to miss anything" (Interview, June 20). Mrs.

Parrish is not interested in doing it the fast way. This view is parallel to one Amy holds about doing it the "cheating" way.

As a result of these beliefs, Amy is not encouraged to spend any time at home learning or practicing short-cut techniques. More importantly, the idea of reading from cover to cover is re-enforced as something worthwhile and valuable. Having so much respect for her mother, it is difficult for Amy to think of reading in any other way even though she has ample evidence that skimming and other such methods are effective for her, but her mother's cover to cover method is not.

Therefore, although Amy could improve her comprehension by employing other reading strategies, she continues to use an ineffective strategy that she feels is sanctioned by her mother, who is a good reader. It is interesting to note that Amy's father - another good reader - employs alternate strategies. Amy described her father's habit of reading the last chapter of a book first in a negative manner. Amy believes that skipping material is wrong. She believes that her poor performance on some tests indicates that this strategy is not an effective one.

Due to her "super-imposed" beliefs, Amy sells herself short and considers herself not to be reading when she is. She disregards all of the reading she does at school: skimming, reading titles and so on, as well as the reading she does at the video store where she works, such as reading titles of videos and typing movie names. It seems the only time she considers herself to be reading is when she ploughs through a whole chapter, page by page. Amy does not give herself the benefit of her positive reading experiences as they do not fit in with her conception of reading. She writes in her journal: "...I felt kind of bad because I feel as though I have not read enough to give Mr. M. a sense (sic) of my problem" (Amy's Journal, May 20). Amy puts herself down because of abilities she supposedly doesn't possess. However, one need not be proficient in reading to be able to understand one's own feelings. I believe she is so put off by the fact that she doesn't read enough, that she starts putting herself down and doubting her own abilities. It is interesting that she blames a lack of reading for not

understanding her own feelings. And unfortunately, as we got deeper into the issues of reading and her feelings, she continued to blame herself for not being able to give me the “right” answers. “...but I feel as though I don’t know nothing because, I feel like I don’t have enough reading skills to tell him what I feel, cause even I don’t know how I feel about reading, cause I don’t read enough” (Amy’s Journal, May 27).

Feelings toward reading

With both parents being enthusiastic readers, Amy feels that she must match their zeal. However, she shares neither her parents’ ability, nor their enthusiasm. In discussing reading, Amy frequently used words like boring and frustrating. On the other hand, Mrs. Parrish stated, “I read because I want to read” (Interview, June 20). This statement illustrates that for Mrs. Parrish, reading is an act of pleasure, not one of frustration. When I asked Amy if she viewed reading as being fun, she immediately replied “no” for text books, and gave a half-hearted “yes” for fiction. Even the fictional books she reads she sees as “okay, but not the best” (Interview, June 4). In any case, she doesn’t “read them as much” (Interview, June 4) anymore. One can draw the conclusion that she only reads when she has to, not for fun. Amy also conceded that she often started a book but didn’t finish it because “[I] don’t have time, don’t care about the book, not that interesting, don’t understand it, too frustrated to go on, burn the book, [or] dog ate it” (Interview, June 4). When she chose novels that were more interesting, she wanted to quit because they were too difficult. “It would have to be *really* interesting [for me to finish it]. I’d probably get my parents to read it or something” (Interview, June 4). It became obvious that reading is more a chore than a pleasurable or an information-gathering event. “I probably keep reading [even though it’s boring] just in case I miss something” (Interview, June 4). Quite often while reading, thoughts like “let’s get through this” (Interview, June 4), or “one more paragraph and then a break” (Interview, June 4) run through her head.

For Amy in her current stage of life, reading is only a means to academic success. "Mother's put it into my head [that marks are important]" (Interview, May 15). "I put up with [reading] because of marks ... only 'cause of test marks. That's the only reason why I do most of it." (Interview, June 4). She does admit that there are other reasons for reading:

A: ... and some day living on my own, being able to buy my groceries and a job. ... It's important because reading is basically everything. If you want to do anything ... you have to read what you're buying.

R: In terms of general life you mean.

A: Yeah, read the signs on the road, read how much things are, reading where you're working. [People read] for enjoyment, for learning, for something to do.

R: How important is reading to you?

A: I don't know, I don't know. I guess it's pretty, obviously it's pretty important because that's one way most teachers teach you how to learn.

R: You don't sound that convinced though.

A: Well it's just 'cause sometimes I'm fed up with those textbooks.

R: Why are you fed up with it?

A: 'Cause it's hard, I don't understand it. (Interview, June 4)

Even though Amy realizes that reading is necessary for such daily activities as buying groceries and getting a job, she does not view reading as being useful to her, especially at the present time.

Leisure reading

Amy would like to choose books to read in her leisure time on the basis of interest rather than level of difficulty. However, in reality, she chooses books like those by author R. L. Stine, which are easy but have lost their interest for her. In fact, Amy explains that "You get bored after a while because you know the pattern of them [but] I just trust that one [author R. L. Stine]" (Interview, May 21). She finds them to be good books with a manageable level of difficulty; they are safe and predictable. At the same time, however, she doesn't read as much anymore because she is bored by such uninteresting books.

R: Could your choice of books cause you to stop reading for fun?

A: Yeah probably. I think that's kind of what's happening right now. I'm just kind of bored with the books. I'm just getting sick of it. I know it's not good. I should be trying to read every day.

R: Why?

A: Why? To improve my skills or even just learning new words in that book. (Interview, June 10)

Amy has been reading R. L. Stine books since grade nine. I believe she has outgrown them intellectually, but is unable to read higher than that level. It is obvious that she has grown tired of the formula-fictional style of those type of books. She desperately wants to break away from them, and has attempted to do so. However, when she has chosen books which her peers read, like Stephen King, it has been a frustrating experience. These types of books, while interesting, are "out of her league". Amy said that she felt good when she finished an interesting book. Unfortunately, that rarely happens.

Amy enjoys reading magazines and comics, but she does not view that as a legitimate form of reading. "I feel as though I should be reading more than comics, I guess I should try to start, hopefully over the summer. I feel kind of dump [sic.], because I know I should read but just didn't get the chance" (Amy's Journal, May 20). Here, Amy repeats a familiar pattern: she chides herself for reading mere "fluff"; she picks a time, usually in the future, to start "serious reading"; she admits she doesn't like reading; and she offers an explanation as to why she can't read. Mrs. Parrish shared her observations of Amy's leisure reading experiences:

[She reads] just occasionally. She'll read magazines and that's still reading thank God and she'll quite enjoy reading some of those silly magazines but I think the language level of those magazines must be considerably low. So if the material is in any way advanced, if it has a lot of idioms and words that are not as current as we're using right now, then she has a real problem with that. So she won't take the time to try and see if that word works in the context of the story. She'll probably skip over it. So for her, reading for comprehension is still a struggle. I know that reading is still not easy for her. She will often miss the punch-lines in comics. She misses out on all those language-based subtleties. Her frustration is obvious often (body language, facial...) or she'll just say "I've had enough. I don't want to do anymore of this. ... leave it," or she'll hand me the book and say "You read it to me." That's even now. (Interview, June 20)

It is not surprising that after working so hard to keep up her marks, Amy would avoid spending her leisure time in an activity that she finds frustrating. Due to her course load, Amy has a lot of homework (on average two hours per night), which includes much reading. In the free time Amy has remaining, she chooses to go out with her friends or watch TV, rather than read. When asked why she chooses TV over reading she says, "There's not much to it [TV]. You just have to sit down and watch. ... Reading there's more to it, it's more of a challenge" (Interview, May 15). The temptation of the television as an alternate form of leisure is a challenge for Amy. Although Amy feels that she should read, she finds watching television to be so much less frustrating than attempting to read an interesting age-appropriate book. Her other choice - reading easy books - leads to boredom and takes away from the point of reading for leisure. When asked how she feels when she reads instead of watching TV, Amy replied, "when I finish an interesting book I feel good" (Interview, May 15), but that lately she was watching TV as it was easier than reading. Mrs. Parrish reinforced this observation: "I don't think that she's really all that keen to pick up a novel and read. I'm sure she'd much rather watch a movie than read because it's easier for her" (Interview, June 20).

Oral reading

While Amy has difficulty with both oral and silent reading, she considers oral reading to be the "culprit" in her reading problems. She believes oral reading means to perform without a fault in front of others, and she emphasizes the importance of correct pronunciation over comprehension. Amy is so concerned about pronouncing every word correctly that even when she understood the meaning of a word in a passage she read to me (e.g. biotic), she was upset that she couldn't pronounce it. She made note of the incident in a follow-up discussion: "I screwed up the last part of this sentence" (Interview, June 10). In fact, she admitted that she gained very little meaning from the passage she read for me because "I was just trying to ... I was thinking of the words, not really the meaning. ... I wasn't really concentrating on grasping

the whole concept, even though I knew you were going to ask me the questions" (Interview, June 19).

If she realizes that she has made a mistake in pronouncing a word, Amy is so devastated that she is thrown off track. She goes back to the mispronounced word and attempts it again, thereby disrupting her reading flow. In fact, she often has a better sense of what she has mispronounced than what the selection she read was about. Amy's concern about her mistakes surfaced repeatedly in the interviews: "I was just thinking how I didn't do too good 'cause I didn't know some of the words...I don't know what I'm reading when I'm reading out loud...I race through it to get it done" (Interview, May 21); "When I'm reading [aloud] it's like thumping and it's scrambled" (Interview, June 13); "I was just thinking of the words I screwed up on. I just don't know whether I pronounced them right" (Interview, June 19). It became obvious that in oral reading, saying the words and moving through the passage quickly were more important to Amy than gaining meaning. Indeed, she noted that when reading aloud, "I race through it to get it done" and that she doesn't know what she is reading (Interview, May 21).

A: My eyes were wandering off before I was saying them so I'd have to go back and read it again...just 'cause I was trying to get it over with.

R: You mean your eyes were looking other places?

A: No, just going ahead. (Interview, June 19)

Thus, oral reading has become a wasted activity from which Amy gains no meaning or satisfaction. "I never get anywhere 'cause I don't understand it" (Interview, May 15). She is caught in a vicious circle in which she is devastated if she makes a mistake and so she avoids oral reading, thus denying herself the opportunity to improve. When she is subsequently required to read aloud portions of *Hamlet* in English or parts of a history chapter in Social Studies class, she panics, makes a mistake and is devastated once again. In this way, her dislike of oral reading is reinforced by her experience.

Fear

Amy particularly dislikes reading aloud in the classroom as she is fearful that her classmates will think that she cannot read and that there is something wrong with her, confirmed by the fact that she is in a special education program. "I just don't want my fellow students to know...that I have this problem [because] the students will make a judgment...that I have this problem and I'm in this program because of it" (Interview, May 24). Her main goal in oral reading is to hide her "imperfections" from her friends. When teachers correct her pronunciation, Amy feels embarrassed and nervous because attention is being brought to her inability. "It's a fear of people saying 'yeah, you can't read'" (Interview, May 15). Amy described a traumatic experience in grade eight, when she was asked to read aloud a portion of a novel. She made several mistakes and began, "sweating ... and my heart was thumping" (Interview, May 21). She felt bad because she didn't know how to say the words.

Embarrassment

Embarrassment is such a big issue to Amy that she avoids seeking help from the teacher to deal with unknown words. According to her, such a step would bring attention to her and people would know that she has a reading problem (Interview, June 4). Thus, rather than dealing with her pronunciation difficulties, Amy simply skips the words or says them quickly, hoping that no one notices. This strategy works at times. "Sometimes it would be okay 'cause they weren't paying attention anyways. The teacher wouldn't be or the students. They didn't care too much" (Interview, May 21). Another strategy Amy has developed is to avoid oral reading altogether by remaining quiet and not being a bother so that teachers do not choose her.

A: [I would] sit back and [not] ask any questions. Be quiet...No teachers picked on me; I was quiet enough.

R: Did that work?

A: It still does. (Interview, May 15)

However, Amy sometimes feels that she is not asked to read because she has been identified as a poor reader, which she finds hurtful. "They don't pick on me because they know I have a label...so sometimes they wouldn't make me [read]...[but] I *do* know how to read, but maybe just not as well as others...[I]t doesn't bother me too much though 'cause [oral reading] is a fear" (Interview, May 15).

Reading at school

Amy is not as averse to reading in front of teachers as she is to reading in front of her peers because she considers teachers to be more sympathetic and less judgmental (Interview, May 21). "I'm kinda used to [my teachers knowing] now 'cause teachers are more probably understanding 'cause they know why" (Interview, May 24). However, she maintains that "I don't like [reading at school] because we are forced to do it" (Interview, May 15). She gets frustrated by the activity and can see no real purpose for it in the classroom, other than as a means of keeping the students on task by the teacher:

R: Is oral reading done by teachers to test you or to help you?

A: Out of the two, I'd say it's testing. They want to see if you can read this much...I think they just want everybody to listen to it, get everyone to pay attention.

R: See if the kids are paying attention?

A: Yeah. But they might be testing me.

R: You think there might be a difference between you and another student? Why would you think they might be testing you and not just ...

A: Because I have a reading problem and they know that.

R: And they're just testing your ability?

A: Basically. [Nods head] Most of them are testing me, just listening for mistakes. (Interview, June 13)

Amy perceives fear to be one of the reasons why she doesn't read as well. When I asked her how she would feel if I gave her a surprise reading activity, her first reaction was, "Oh my God" (Interview, May 15). She then explained that "I'd be thinking of what it was,

what kind of words would be on it, nervous obviously...your heart would start pounding, you would start sweating, become embarrassed and red" (Interview, May 15). Even when it is another student's turn to read aloud she remains fearful. Her attention is focused on counting paragraphs and students in the row before her to determine which passage she will have to read. "I try and read the whole paragraph before I have to read it out...I count the people and how many paragraphs" (Interview, May 21). When she determines which paragraph she will have to read aloud, Amy scans her passage looking for difficult words.

Amy is focused solely on pronouncing the words correctly and worried about how the words will sound to the other students. When I asked her if she gets the content of the material when there is a class oral reading exercise, Amy responded emphatically "No! Not really. I'm just basically zooming through it for what words I can't pronounce and just trying to say it out in my head so it doesn't sound funny when I read it out loud" (Interview, June 10). Amy often discussed her concern about how her voice sounds to others when she reads out loud: "You're under pressure when you have to read out loud. You have to be perfect in pronunciation and everything...I don't like the sound of my voice" (Interview, May 15); "Just listening to my own voice, it's weird. You think that everything is going wrong" (Interview, May 21); "You're nervous and I think you can tell in your voice...It echoes...You're just worrying about a lot of things. What it sounds like to other people, what's the next word, is it going to be difficult?" (Interview, May 21)

Pressure

Amy's association between oral reading and pressure emerged as a consistent theme throughout the interviews. "Reading out loud, that's pressure" (Interview, May 15). Amy believes that her teachers expect perfection from her, as she expects of herself. As a result of this tremendous amount of pressure, Amy commonly experiences anxiety attacks during oral reading. In order to deal with these attacks, Amy tries to slow down to sound better and attempts to remain calm. Although oral reading is a challenge for her in any setting, she does

not suffer such panic attacks when reading at home because she does not have to worry about performing in front of her peers. Yet even though Amy feels comfortable reading out loud to her mother, she would prefer someone else to read to her so that she can concentrate on the actual content. In this way she can see the words, hear them and develop a mental picture in her head.

Silent reading

Amy perceives silent reading to be less difficult than oral reading: "Silent reading is better for me" (Interview, May 21). In silent reading, Amy doesn't have to worry about performing for others because she can hide her mistakes. As Amy insists on attempting words she has mispronounced over and over again, she finds oral reading to be choppy. "It sounds like it's nervous and it sounds like you're stopping...you know how you sound one word out and it sounds like it's in syllables" (Interview, May 21). Silent reading is much smoother for Amy because she can skip some words and thus focus on comprehension. "Silent reading is smooth; it's all together probably 'cause I understand it more...Silent reading is more exciting because I can picture it in my head more, understand the words more. And I probably get more out of it, I understand it more" (Interview, May 21). In addition, Amy does not suffer panic attacks from silent reading as there is no pressure to perform perfectly.

Self image

With both silent and oral reading, Amy is ashamed of her weakness and fearful that she will be labeled by her friends, her employer and even her teachers. She is very sensitive about people knowing about her reading difficulties or that she is in a special education program. Amy is very hard on herself and becomes upset with herself if she makes even a single mistake. She assumes that when she makes a mistake, others will be quick to judge her and consider her to be a bad reader. Amy has really only confided in one friend (Betty) about her learning difficulties. "I told her that I have this reading difficulty and she understands. She'll

explain [things] to me...She's probably more understanding because I've known her longer and she knows more about it, I guess" (Interview, May 21). If Betty is not there, Amy leaves the assignment to do at home rather than ask anybody else for help. She is unlikely to ask the teacher for help because she is "embarrassed about it 'cause everyone else is silent reading and then they can hear you" (Interview, June 14).

Amy is so concerned about the judgment of her peers that even after having used the resource room for four years, she has not told them what she really uses it for. She tells them that it is merely a place where she does her homework. She still does not feel comfortable telling them why she is in the program. According to her mother, Amy is "still at a stage that she doesn't want anyone to know" (Interview, June 20) because she is worried about the her peers may perceive her. She's afraid that being in the CELD program may make her stick out more and that when she makes a mistake, people will attribute it to the fact that she is in a program.

This fear of being labeled a poor or non-reader was further illustrated by her negative reaction to passages I read to her describing the experiences of non-readers. I asked her if she could relate to some of these experiences and, even though her responses to other questions had revealed similar experiences, she maintained that they were different. She kept saying, "I can read ... I'm not as bad as they are" (Interview, May 15). In a later interview I asked Amy if she could relate to the experience of one of the non-readers who described 'shutting down' when reading. Amy smiled and admitted, "It is similar" (Interview, June 13).

Amy feels inadequate when she is compared to Betty. Amy sees Betty learning new words because her mother "speaks big words"(Interview, May 21) to Betty. However, according to Amy, her mother doesn't attempt the same strategy with Amy, "I guess because she knows I won't understand [the words]" (Interview, May 21). When I pressed her further as to the reason why it wouldn't work for her, she stated that it was due to her reading problems. It was interesting to see that Amy saw the new words as a positive for Betty, yet as a negative for herself. When I pointed out this contradiction to Amy and asked her to discuss

why she felt this way, Amy explained, "Maybe because she can learn faster...and maybe I just think that I can't" (Interview, June 10). Amy just assumes that she is worse than Betty at reading because "maybe just the label that I have, a reading or whatever disability, maybe I just thought why bother trying" (Interview, June 10). Amy considers Betty to be the best reader she knows because "Betty reads it and comprehends it...I don't know [how]. She's got some magic tricks in her pocket or something" (Interview, May 21). In reality, Amy is getting better marks than Betty.

People's perceptions of Amy

I asked Amy if she thought people viewed her mistakes differently than Betty's. At first, she said that people did think that there was a difference in her and Betty's mistakes. However, when I asked her how she knew that, she started to change her mind. She stated that perhaps she was just being self-conscious and taking it too far and not necessarily that others think that there is a difference.

R: Why do you think people would judge your mistakes more harshly than Betty's?

A: Personally, I think because I'm self-conscious of that, then it would probably just be *me* taking it too far myself, just thinking that they're saying all these things and stuff and not really them doing it actually. (Interview, May 24)

Amy is afraid that other students will give her a hard time because she is in a special education program even though she hasn't experienced any such harassment to date. In fact, the only negative experience she could recall was in grade eight when she had to leave the classroom to take a test in the resource room. As she was leaving the room everyone looked at her; that was the extent of the problem. Although this incident may appear to be a very minor one, Amy was terribly embarrassed by appearing different from her peers. She states: "... I can't stand to be embarrassed all the time because I have to tell my employer or teacher that I can't read as well as others" (Amy's Journal, June 4).

Work

Due to her self-consciousness about her reading, Amy would rather risk people at work thinking that she doesn't know how to do something than have them know that she is a poor speller or a poor reader. Amy works as a video store clerk renting videos to customers and shelving videos. If she has difficulty spelling or reading a title, Amy would rather tell her co-workers that she didn't understand how to do the procedure than admit that she has difficulty reading. "Once they know that I have this problem, they would probly [sic] think that it is alot of extra work, so why bother hiring me..." (Amy's Journal, June 4). She doesn't tell people about her learning difficulties because she's afraid of reprisals from friends or that she will be refused certain jobs. Amy explained that she would let an employer, friend or teacher know about her reading difficulties only when she felt comfortable with them and could trust them to take her problem seriously and not to ridicule her.

R: Have you experienced any problems at work because of reading?

A: No, just 'cause of spelling problems 'cause you have to type it into the computer and if you don't spell it properly, then you're not gonna get the title.

R: Have you had that trouble?

A: Yeah.

R: How do you get around that?

A: I call somebody over and I just say I don't know what to do.

R: But you really do know what to do, but its just that you don't know how to spell so instead of saying 'I can't spell', you say 'I can't do'?

A: Right.

R: You must feel not as knowledgeable about your work if you have to ask someone for help all the time.

A: Right.

R: Is that less of a price for you to pay than to say, 'Well, I actually do know the procedure. I'm just not a great speller'?

A: I think it's less if I say I don't know how to do it.

R: Do you think that will have any long-term effects? Like on nursing?

A: I'm sure that after a while, I would ask them how to spell it or something. This is just the beginning...[I would tell them about my trouble spelling] maybe after a long while.

R: What would have to happen for you to feel comfortable to say 'I can't spell'?

A: Probably if I knew them better personally. (Interview, June 4)

Trust

For Amy the concept of trust and comfort is extremely important, particularly with respect to oral reading. If trust is not established between herself and her "audience", whether it be the class or the teacher, the experience becomes a painful one for her. Amy explained that in such situations she views the teacher as testing her rather than helping her and starts "sweating because of what [the teacher] expects" (Interview, June 13). She becomes nervous even if the reading selection is an easy one. She then starts to focus on how she is performing and the teacher's opinion of her instead of the selection. At its worst, Amy begins questioning the teacher's motives, wondering "What do you want [to do], to put me down?" (Interview, June 18) In one instance, a teacher (referred to here as Smith) was extremely picky about student performance and in some cases made fun of weaker students such as Amy. As a trusting relationship did not exist between Amy and Smith, Amy experienced great anxiety and her reading performance suffered. After Amy read an easy selection out loud to me, I asked her if she would have read it in the same way for Smith. Amy replied,

I probably would have been sweating it, kind of embarrassed, thinking of what he expects, looking for the words I can't pronounce. Nervous. It probably wouldn't have been easy. I probably would have made all these mistakes 'cause I'm already nervous. (Interview, June 10)

The trust factor determines what kind of a reader Amy will be for that audience. If she doesn't trust the person she exhibits qualities of a poor reader by not attempting the reading, especially if it is a difficult one. In her own words, Amy "...would just tell him [Smith] I can't do it and I don't even want to attempt it. No way!" (Interview, June 10) Her solution would be simply to "shut down" and stop reading. "I guess 'cause you just don't want to go through

the frustration of trying to attempt to read it. Like attempting it is okay, but then trying to read more and more and more, you just get more frustrated. So you just want to stop and throw the book away" (Interview, June 13).

Reading can be a learning experience for Amy if she feels comfortable with her audience. In her journal Amy assured me that she didn't mind reading for me, "...not only 'cause there is a purpose but also 'cause I feel comfortable with reading to you, and I would prefer it that way 'cause I know you won't go around telling people my problems, or making fun of me" (Amy's Journal, June 14). Amy provided several examples of how important trust was in her willingness to participate in teaching activities. Once trust had been established she was willing to take risks. Without that bond she would rather just quit.

The most startling example of the importance of trust arose when we were discussing trust and the position of certain teachers. I asked Amy if she trusted me because of my position as a resource teacher or as the person Mr. Mehrassa that she knew. She replied that she trusted the person not the position. I also asked her if Mr. Smith were the CELD teacher and I was the regular classroom teacher would she still have the same feelings about reading for each of us? She replied that "It's just I know you better than I know him" (Interview, June 18). She further explained that she would read for me even if she could see no purpose for it. This point demonstrates the importance of trust in the teacher-student relationship. Part of the reason why Amy doesn't like oral reading is that she sees no purpose to it, yet she was willing to read for me even if there were no purpose for it. At the same time she would be reticent to read for Mr. Smith even with a purpose. Amy only feels comfortable reading for one other teacher because she believes that teacher doesn't read very well either. Because the teacher, who has a slight English accent, asked another student to help her with some editing work, Amy assumes that the teacher must also have learning difficulties. "I know she's not that great a speller or a reader 'cause...she asked one of her students in her class...[and] had one of her friends do her editing for her" (Interview, June 13). "She doesn't pronounce things right...that's because of her accent" (Interview, June 18). Thus, in Amy's eyes the teacher is fallible, unlike Mr.

Smith, who wants to show the students how knowledgeable and wise he is. When teachers appear to always be right, they also appear to be unapproachable to Amy.

Purpose

A sense of purpose in an activity is important to Amy. Once she has a goal, almost nothing will stop her. For example, she sees academics as being very important and so she puts in a tremendous amount of work and effort to achieve excellent marks. "I put school first" (Interview, May 15). On the other hand, when she sees no purpose in an activity it is hard for her to maintain the same level of determination. For example, when her dad used flash cards at home to try to improve Amy's reading she didn't see a purpose for them and found them boring. As a result, she didn't get very much out of that activity. However, when her mother read to her every night, Amy did not back away from the repetitive nature of the work because she viewed it as being necessary to complete her school work. Her mother's pushing was more effective because Amy saw that its purpose "was to actually do the [course] work and try to get it done" (Interview, May 24).

In one of her journal entries Amy wrote, "I think that this stuff is boring, but I know it's for a good purpose so I'll stick to it" (Amy's Journal, May 24). In an interview she said, "That's for a cause so that's O.K." (Interview, May 21). Again, this is an example of Amy's tenacity when she sees value in a certain task. Furthermore, knowing the purpose of things is important enough to Amy that she will try to clarify ambiguities, as evidenced in her June 14th journal entry: "What is the purpose of the reading? I was also wondering, 'cause I kinda forgot about the purpose to the whole thing". Even for oral reading Amy concedes that the purpose of it is to see if students understand the material. However, as it doesn't work for her, she doesn't believe there is a point to it. For her, nothing is achieved by the exercise in terms of gaining knowledge. However, in a resource room, her perception is that she will get help and not be ridiculed and therefore there is a purpose to reading. Unfortunately Amy currently does not see much point in improving her reading. She states, "Reading is not useful to me

now 'cause I don't do it anyways or I can get someone to do it for me. I get by" (Interview, June 4). There is always someone around to do it for her, and it only becomes a "nuisance" if no one is nearby from whom she can get help. It is only then that she takes it more seriously (Interview, June 4).

Strategies

Amy's hard work and survival strategies have helped her to achieve academic success in the face of a reading disability. According to Amy, although being in the CELD program has negative consequences - being labeled and feeling "different" from other students - it has also provided some relief from reading aloud for Amy because teachers tend to refrain from calling on her as much (Interview, June 15). Amy also makes herself as inconspicuous as possible by being quiet and well-behaved. In addition to such avoidance strategies, Amy also employs strategies to cover up some of her reading problems. She uses memorization to mask her inability to comprehend. For example, when she was discussing a selection with me, she used phrases directly from the passage rather than paraphrasing. On the surface it appeared as though she had understood the meaning of the passage. However, when faced with questions testing her comprehension it became obvious that Amy was simply repeating phrases without understanding them. Amy also memorizes portions of text that she might have to read or use for a test, rather than rely on her reading ability. "I have to memorize everything [to learn]. I write it out a couple of times...Understanding comes after memorizing...so if a test is coming up, I have to memorize everything, which doesn't work too well 'cause teachers go through it pretty fast" (Interview, May 21). She doesn't remember information from the notes she takes in class, but "just cop[ies] it down in case [she] need[s] it later" (Interview, May 21). This process is a time-consuming one and would explain why Amy needs to spend so much time on her studies during the week.

When Amy can't understand or misses information presented in class she is more likely to ask her friends for the information than the teacher. In her perception, the former is more

socially acceptable and the latter, more stigmatizing. Amy also uses reading strategies to gain meaning. For example, when questioned as to what “trundled” means in the phrase “the boxcar trundled across”, Amy used contextual clues to extrapolate the meaning. She responded that as it “obviously meant that they’re [the boxcar] going somewhere”, “trundled” must be a word describing motion (Interview, June 10). In another example, Amy was able to understand that “Venezuela” was a place even though she was unable to pronounce it. She determined that as the word was capitalized it referred to either a person or a place. Based on the context of the story she concluded that it had to be the name of a place, not a person.

Finally, I have observed Amy employing reading techniques such as skimming and scanning titles, pictures and graphs in the resource room. "I'd probably go through the book and look at all the pictures first before I'd even attempt to read it." (Interview, June 4) Amy has also used these techniques with success in her regular classes to find answers for her assignments. "I read the first paragraph and kind of get a sense of where everything is. [I can't keep the ideas in the text straight] 'cause the reading level is a lot harder...so I make notes...or get somebody else to read it for me. Or sometimes they read it, they understand it and then make a picture for me." (Interview, May 21) When Amy finds a word that she cannot understand, she employs one or more of the following strategies, in the order presented:

1. skips it;
2. uses context: "I read the sentence before and after, read around it" (Interview, May 21);
3. asks her mother or Betty;
4. asks the teacher: "I guess I'd *have* to go to the teacher [if I couldn't take the assignment home]" (Interview, May 21);
5. looks it up in the dictionary.

Unfortunately, as discussed earlier, Amy uses reading techniques such as skimming and scanning inconsistently and with reluctance and shame because they don't correspond with her “total reading” concept.

Support network

The support Amy has received from her mother, her friends and various teachers has been vital to her academic success. Since elementary school she has had access to a resource room teacher in varying degrees. One of Amy's strengths has been to be a self-advocate and take advantage of the resources offered to her. She is also quite good at asking her resource teachers to intervene in "sticky" situations. She aims to fix the problem rather than ignore it. Moreover, due to her self-advocating nature she has also accessed help from her regular classroom teachers for course work, but not for problems relating strictly to reading.

In addition to her teachers Amy has an excellent support network of friends. According to her mother, Amy has made a "good choice of peers"(Interview, June 20). Her closest friend, Betty, is the one Amy relies on most and to whom she divulges the most about her learning difficulties. She travels in circles where school work and good marks are considered to be important. As a result, she can always access her friends' notes to make sure that she has all of the information without being chastised for being a "nerd" or looked at in a strange way.

At home Amy has the ultimate support network: her mother. Mrs. Parrish's high level of involvement in Amy's school work became obvious throughout the interviews with both Amy and Mrs. Parrish. As mentioned earlier, Mrs. Parrish often reads to Amy from her school books and for leisure. Furthermore, she advocates on Amy's behalf with the Learning Disabilities Association of British Columbia (LDABC), attempting to get more services in high schools and post-secondary institutions and more scholarships for the learning disabled. It is because of these support networks that Amy can interact in her classes as well as she does. For example, if she is stuck on an assignment she knows that she has the option of leaving it when she is frustrated and then tackling it later with a friend, her resource teacher, or her mother.

Chapter Summary and Implications

Amy's story revealed how her views as to the nature of reading significantly affected her overall reading experience. Due to her misconceptions about the purpose of reading, she has been plagued by self-doubt and confusion. She is constantly entangled in a dilemma: to read in the way that she believes to be the "right way", or to use strategies that enable her to gain meaning more effectively.

Amy feels that she is not a good reader, particularly when compared to her parents or Betty. Due to her lower reading ability, her experience with reading in high school has been fairly negative. Factors such as fear, pressure and embarrassment serve to remind her of the potential negative consequences of reading. Although Amy has some strategies to help her make meaning, her current conception of reading prevents her from using these strategies consistently. Amy has been able to overcome many of these obstacles thus far because of her tremendous persistence and effort, and because she has a strong support network of people she trusts. Amy now needs to reassess her understanding of the purpose of reading in order to be able to utilize strategies that will help her to read more effectively.

It is obvious that Amy does not have a positive attitude toward reading. A suggestion to improve her attitude would be to improve the rewards of reading (Cothorn & Collins, 1992); that is, choose or provide reading material that offers enjoyment and allows her to do what Rosenblatt refers to as "aesthetic reading". The choice of reading material should correspond to Amy's interests rather than to the teacher's convenience. Specifically, Mathewson (1985) suggests that content, format (presence of pictures, print size and style), and form (syntax or dialects) should be taken into account when choosing reading material. Another solution offered by McKenna et al. (1995) is to alter Amy's beliefs. Researchers suggest that attitudes can be altered by changing beliefs (Mathewson, 1994; McKenna, 1994). McKenna et al. offer three ways to achieve this change: weaken or eradicate existing beliefs; provide evidence that is in contrast to existing beliefs; and change how a person views and associates with an object.

Once beliefs begin to change, new attitudes will be shaped which should lead to improved reading.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

When I began this study, my expectation was that this research would lead me to develop reading strategies for Amy which would allow her to become a more effective reader. Amy was excited by this prospect as she wanted desperately to improve her reading, but felt that she was unable to do so on her own. In carrying out my research, I was surprised to learn that Amy did have some strategies already. The course of my study was drastically altered when I realized that Amy's difficulty with reading was rooted in her views as to its nature and her consequent reluctance to use the strategies she already knew. Although this realization came as a surprise to me, the literature supports the notion that success in reading is linked significantly to how one views reading (Robinson et al., 1993).

Amy has had the benefit of many approaches suggested in the literature to promote reading (Freppon, 1994). She has been raised in a literate environment where reading is encouraged and respected. Books are valued in Amy's home and frequently given as gifts. Mrs. Parrish regularly took Amy to the library and both Mr. and Mrs. Parrish often read in front of her. Mr. Parrish has practiced reading with Amy using flash cards and Mrs. Parrish frequently reads out loud to Amy in order to help her with her schoolwork. Amy has also been encouraged to write. She has made shopping lists, kept journals, and had pen pals. Amy also possesses some of the personal qualities of a good reader identified in the literature. She is an extremely hard-working, motivated, energetic and persistent student who attributes her academic success to her effort (Bandura, 1993).

Given Amy's desire to be a good reader, her persistence, her mother's support, her access to resources through the CELD program and her knowledge of reading strategies and techniques, the lack of improvement in Amy's reading ability seems to undermine reductionist theories put forth in the literature. The majority of the literature fails to address the significant

impact that the students' perception of reading may have on their performance (Johnston, 1985; Athey, 1985).

Prior to this study, I had not given much thought to what my students believed the nature of reading to be. I just assumed -- as many teachers do -- that students understand the "correct" purpose of reading; that they were taught in earlier classes that the goal of reading is to make meaning. As Amy articulated her views about reading throughout the interviews, the explanation for her continued problems in reading became clear to me, as did the contribution the study could make to helping Amy improve her reading. Amy's very narrow and rigid view of the nature and purpose of reading holds her back. In her view, true reading means reading every single word from the first to the last and pronouncing each word flawlessly. She does not give herself credit for anything less and feels guilty and ashamed when she "weakens" and uses strategies such as skimming or scanning titles. As Amy's focus is on pronouncing each and every word, she gains little or no meaning from what she reads. Amy's concept of reading is a common one as evidenced in the literature (Johns, 1984; Tovey, 1985).

As a result of the different influences on her reading development, Amy formed the idea that reading is about "saying the words". There was an emphasis placed on oral reading in her classes. In addition, this belief was implicitly communicated to Amy by Mrs. Parrish who does not like to miss anything in a passage or a book.

Regardless of how Amy's view was formed, the important step to take now is to widen that view, to help her to adopt a more holistic approach to reading. With this thought in mind, our goal should now be to identify which strategies work best for Amy - and only Amy. Then, Amy can practice using them with the understanding that these strategies are a legitimate means to make meaning and that she need not feel guilty for using them. My role as her resource teacher will be to reinforce the efficacy of using such strategies and to demonstrate to her that they will enhance her chances of becoming a more effective reader. This goal is an attainable one as, even throughout the course of the interviews, Amy demonstrated a perceptible shift in attitude.

R: If both the reader [as in Amy's version] and the skimmer said they grasped the concept and both were reading, would you consider the skimmer to be cheating?

A: No, the skimmer isn't a cheater, because they know the stuff, right? If they can answer questions on the stuff that means they still had to somehow get it in their head and learn it. (June 13)

Once Amy is able to focus her considerable effort and dedication to making meaning in reading, her ultimate goal -- to be a good reader -- will be within her reach.

When I communicated these conclusions to Amy in the debriefing session, as a form of respondent validation, her initial reaction was one of disappointment. She had not received the magical program that would "fix" her reading difficulties. However, she and her mother did concur that the data presented in this thesis was faithful to the original interviews.

Implications

Through this study I came to the understanding that what a student believes about reading will ultimately affect his/her reading experience. I now realize the importance of understanding the student first, with his/her history, background and complexities. This realization came about because I worked so closely with Amy. I believe that this close working relationship was the key to my study. While some may perceive this level of involvement on the part of the researcher as "contaminating" the data, I believe that it allowed me to gather more authentic data. In the course of this study, Amy and I built upon the trust we had already cultivated in our teacher-student relationship, to develop a stronger researcher-subject relationship. In this way, Amy and I were able to communicate more effectively and honestly, thus enabling me to assemble a better product.

This study has identified further areas of interest for me to investigate. A natural extension would be to work with other students of mine, exploring their perceptions of the nature of reading. Further research could also be carried out to identify how these views developed and who influenced their development. Another related area of study would involve

examining teachers' views of reading and the means by which they communicate these views to their students.

In the course of this study, I realized that I neither teach reading to my students, nor do I discuss issues such as the purpose of reading with them. As a secondary school teacher, I always took it for granted that such matters would already have been addressed by the elementary school teachers. I just assumed that my students shared my definition of reading.

Now I believe that as a teacher, I need to change how I students with their reading. I must address the nature of reading with my students and discuss that meaning making is the primary purpose of reading. I have to let my students know that they are not cheating if they skip parts of a selection and find answers by using headings. I plan to make it clear to my students that reading can be a complex skill to develop and that it is not unusual to experience difficulties. At the same time, I will encourage my students to use all tools at their disposal to attain meaning, stressing that each individual should use whichever tools are the most effective for them.

At this stage I do not know how Amy will be affected in the long term by this experience. I do know it has already changed my practices. For example, while reading to Amy for one of her courses, I took the time to acknowledge the mistakes I made. Together, we discussed that making mistakes was a natural part of reading. As a result of my experience with Amy, I no longer view reading aloud to my students simply as an exercise to extract information from text books. I use it as an opportunity to discuss the nature of reading, as well as strategies and techniques I may use to make meaning. This thesis enabled me to examine and enhance my teaching practices and it is my hope that it will assist other teachers to do the same.

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I, _____, do/do not agree to participate in the research project "Understanding the Reading Process: A Case Study of a Learning Disabled High School Student," to be conducted by Ramin Mehrassa. I acknowledge that I have received a letter describing the study. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, and that pseudonyms will be used to protect my privacy.

SIGNATURE

DATE

I, _____, do/do not give my permission for my son/daughter/ward to participate in the research project "Understanding the Reading Process: A Case Study of a Learning Disabled High School Student," to be conducted by Ramin Mehrassa. Further, I do/do not consent to participate myself in the above named project. I acknowledge that I have received a letter describing the study. I understand that I may withdraw my son/daughter/ward and/or myself from the study at any time without penalty, and that pseudonyms will be used to protect our privacy.

SIGNATURE

DATE

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Feelings Category:

- Do you like to read?
- What did that experience feel like?
- How do you feel now when you have to read?
- How do you feel when you read at home? at school?
- Do you see reading as fun?
- How do you feel when you read instead of watching T.V.?
- How do you feel when you read a book in free time?
- How do you feel about getting a book for a present?
- How do you feel about taking a reading test?
- How do you feel about using a dictionary?

Procedure Category:

- What do you do when you can't pronounce a word?
- How difficult is reading for you?
- Describe strategies you use to remediate difficulties.
- Do you have the feeling of wanting to move ahead more quickly in your reading in order to find out what happened?
- Do you count to see how many pages left to read?
- Describe strategies you use to remediate difficulties.
- What could you do to improve?
- Who is the best reader you know/in your class? What does he/she do?

Nature of Reading Category:

- Why do we read?
- What does "reading" mean to you?
- Do you see reading as useful?
- How important is reading to you ?
- How relevant is reading to you?

Questions for Mrs. Parrish

- When did Amy learn to read?
- How did Amy learn to read?
- When did she start having reading problems?
- What kind of help did she get at school?
- How were you taught to read?
- What is the purpose of reading?
- How important is reading to you?
- Describe strategies you use to remediate when you have difficulties.

ASSESSMENT OF AMY'S READING LEVEL

Amy was administered the Johns Basic Reading Inventory narrative passages from grades 5 to 10.

Johns, J. L. (1978). Basic Reading Inventory (6th ed.). Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt

ORAL READINGS PROCEDURE

1) Amy reads three different passages orally and I observe her reading, looking for both verbal cues (such as difficulty with decoding, or verbalization of problems) and non-verbal cues (such as body language)

2) Immediately after reading, I ask her how she felt before, during and after reading and ask her to rate the passage's difficulty level on a scale of 1-5.

3) I then ask Amy to retell the passage to me and if she can't, I ask comprehension questions.

Samples of these questions:

Narrative Comprehension Questions (Christopher Pike Selection):

Who did Mike Madison like?

How could he tell she was really in the book?

What was Mike wondering about her?

Expository Comprehension Questions (Science Probe 8 Selection):

What is the purpose of this chapter?

Name two parts of the ecosystem.

What is ecology?

4) What words couldn't you pronounce? Show me.

5) How did you deal with pronunciation difficulties?

6) Were there words you didn't know the meaning of? Which ones?

7) How did you deal with "meaning" difficulties?

8) Were there new words you had no difficulties with? How did you handle those?

NARRATIVE SAMPLE (Christopher Pike Selection):

"Mike Madison sat in class watching the beautiful Jessica Moss putting lipstick on her wide sensual mouth. Jessica was two seats up on his right, and she was reading a Hollywood sex novel. She looked as if she was really into the book. Every other page her cheeks would turn red and breathing would accelerate. Mike suspected she was reading *nasty* parts, and he wondered if Jessica was feeling particularly hard up. Mike sure was. He had not been with a girl since Ann McGaffer. that had been a year ago, only two days before Ann had died. . . ."

EXPOSITORY SAMPLE (Science Probe 8):

In this chapter, you will investigate how living things have similar basic needs. Some needs, such as food, may be obtained from the **biotic** (living) part of the environment. Other needs, such as water, minerals, and air, may be obtained from the **abiotic** (nonliving) part of the environment. For example, you cannot live without air (an abiotic requirement) or without food (a biotic requirement).

Ecology is the science that explores the relationships among living things and between these living things and the nonliving parts of their environment. Knowing about ecology makes it possible to predict which living things will die if the environment is changed in certain ways.

BOOKS USED FOR READING SELECTIONS:

NARRATIVE

Pike, C. (1992). Master of Murder. (pp. 10, 93, 178). New York: Archway Paperback.

Boeckman, T. (1995, October). The Cigar. Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine, pp. 8, 14, 20.

King, S. (1994). Nightmares and Dreamscapes. (pp. 420, 453, 475). New York: Signet.

EXPOSITORY

Yore, L. B. & Beugger, P. (1989). Journeys in Science: Grade 4. (Canadian Edition) (pp. 171, 178). Toronto: Collier MacMillan Canada.

Yore, L. B. & Beugger, P. (1989). Journeys in Science: Grade 5. (Canadian Edition) (pp. 103, 210). Toronto: Collier MacMillan Canada.

Bullard, J., Baumann, F., Deschner, D., Gore, G., McCammon, B., & Sieben, G. (1985). Science Probe 8. (pp. 278, 489). Toronto: John Wiley & Sons.

READING/WRITING INTERVIEW

Name:
Age/Grade:

Date:
School:

1. When you are reading and you come to something you don't know, what do you do?

Do you ever do anything else?

2. Do you think that (ask Teacher's name) is a good reader? _____

Who is a good reader that you know? _____

3. What makes him/her a good reader?

4. Do you think that s/he ever comes to something s/he doesn't know when s/he is reading? _____

5. If YES: When s/he does come to something s/he doesn't know, what do you think s/he does about it?

If NO: Suppose s/he does come to something s/he doesn't know. Pretend: what do you think s/he does about it?

6. If you knew someone was having difficulty reading, how would you help them?

7. What would (a/your) teacher do to help that person?

8. How did you learn to read? What did they do to help you learn?

9. What would you like to do better as a reader?

10. Do you think that you are a good reader? _____

Why or why not?