Influences of Reading Group Experiences on Second Graders' Perceptions of Themselves As Readers

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive study focuses on the understandings expressed by nine second graders about themselves as readers and looks at the direct experiences of the students in their reading groups. Findings suggest that these proficient and less proficient readers hold very different perceptions of themselves as readers and that these perceptions are related to the differences in their learning-to-read experiences. Data also illustrate that although the teacher allocated equivalent amounts of instruction time for both proficient and less proficient readers, the pace of instruction for the less proficient readers was much slower than that of the proficient readers.

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> Well I read pretty slow all the time. I would like to read a little bit faster. I just want to be a good reader, one who reads books all the time, gets the words right and everything.
>
> *Jane*

Jane is a lively, talkative, enthusiastic, hard-working second grader, so why doesn't she view herself as a good reader? What experiences shaped her personal beliefs about reading and herself as a literate being? As students engage in literacy events and read and write different texts, they become socialized to literacy and develop a sense of who they are in their culture, family, and as literate beings (Barrett-Pugh, 2000). Reading instruction in schools plays an important role in this socialization.

Few researchers have examined the influence of instruction on students' perceptions of themselves as readers even though studies indicate that such a relationship exists (Freppon, 1991, 1995; Purcell-Gates & Dahl, 1991). This current study contributes to the existing literature by focusing on the influence of reading instruction on students' reading concepts and their understandings of themselves as readers. Specifically, I look at the understandings expressed by nine second graders about themselves as readers and explore the relationship between their reading group experiences and their literate identities. Such research is critical in order to learn more about the kind of instruction that is likely to help students develop strong, positive literate identities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Two bodies of research are relevant to this study and will be reviewed here. They include research examining students' perceptions of reading as well as the factors that have been identified as having an influence on how reading is perceived.

Student Perceptions of Reading

Researchers have examined students' perceptions of reading to determine whether a lack of knowledge, or inaccurate knowledge, of reading interferes with the acquisition of reading skills and the desire to read (Canney & Winograd, 1979; Denny & Weintraub, 1966; Harste, 1978).

Focus then shifted to examining students' perceptions of various reading strategies and the differences between the strategies used by more and less proficient readers (Jacobs & Paris, 1987; Paris, Wasik, & Turner, 1991; Roehler & Duffy, 1984). The descriptions of proficient readers' strategies that resulted have since been used to develop various instructional programs, primarily focusing on the need for less proficient readers to use the strategies that more proficient readers do.

Influences on Perceptions of Reading

A number of factors have been found to influence children's perceptions of reading, including ability level, socioeconomic status, type of instruction, and gender.

Purcell-Gates and Dahl (1991) looked at low-socioeconomic children's literacy learning in skills-based classrooms, specifically focusing on the learners' perceptions and how they interpret their reading and writing instruction. They found that learners differ in their perceptions of curriculum based in part on the fit between learner knowledge and the curriculum. Freppon's (1995) investigation of low-income urban children's literacy interpretations in a skills-based and whole-language classroom indicates a transaction between type of instruction, individual development in reading and writing, and personal characteristics of the children. She states that "proactive behaviors do not necessarily depend on higher level of prior knowledge or more advanced literacy skills" (p. 526), but on instruction which can critically influence children's motivation and degree of cognitive activity.

Other studies report that traditional and nontraditional types of instruction are perceived differently by students (Oldfather, 1993; West, 1994). Nontraditional instruction is perceived as fun, while the traditional, textbook-driven instruction is seen as work. Studies also show connections between a student's perceptions about reading and a student's gender and how reading is perceived (Swann, 1992); a relationship has been shown between self-perception about reading ability and future job performance (Ulanoff, Quiocho, Roche, & Yaegle, 2000).

Student perceptions about reading can also be influenced by the way instruction is organized (Allington, 1984; Filby & Barnett, 1982; Freppon, 1991; Pallas, 1994). The most common organizational structure used in elementary schools is one that places children into small groups for reading on the basis of their achievement (Rubie, Wilkinson, Parr, & Townsend, 2000).

Hart (1982), in her ethnography of the reading instruction in a single elementary school, observed that low-ability reading groups were characterized by greater attention to language fragments than to language as a means of expression. Low-ability groups also had more restrictions that kept students directed to the business of reading as compared to the high-ability groups. Hart went on to argue that students noticed these features because they were necessary to understanding and operating within the social organization of the school.

Hart's work therefore suggests some connection between students' understanding of reading and the social organization of the school and classrooms. Specifically, her findings suggest that the social organization of the classroom, by influencing what students notice, affects their understandings of the reading process. Hart does not, however, explore the meanings that the students actually held about themselves as readers.

A decade later, Schooley (1994) described third-grade students' attitudes towards reading when they were grouped according to their reading ability. Results indicate that although not all the students in the high group had positive attitudes, "students in the low group had attitudes in the bottom 50% of the class" (p. 2). Jenkins et al. (1994) also examined the effects of ability grouping on students' attitudes about reading and writing. Results indicate that all students grouped according to ability had a negative attitude toward reading and writing as compared to students who were not grouped by ability.

Researchers have examined how students perceive reading and the factors that influence their perception of reading, but little research is available that described factors that influence students' perceptions of themselves as readers. This is a critical oversight because simply changing materials and methods used with less proficient readers, without regard to their perceptions of self, will likely continue to result in less than optimal gains in reading achievement (Rist, 1970). Educators need to understand the self-perceptions of less proficient readers and find ways to change negative self-perceptions (Schell, 1992).

This present study not only examines students' perceptions of themselves as readers, it also explores the potential links between reading group practices and how students view themselves as readers. The following research questions guided this inquiry:

1) What kind of reading experiences do proficient and less proficient readers engage in, in this second-grade class?
2) How do these reading group experiences influence the students' perceptions of themselves as readers?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The students in the study were nine second graders enrolled in a K–6 public elementary school located in a predominantly white middle-class neighborhood in a large city in western New York. Less than 25% of the school student population received free or subsidized lunches. Second-grade students were selected because that grade is considered to be a crucial year for the development of reading skills (Spache & Spache, 1973). During this grade, for example, sound-symbol relationships are mastered, and comprehension becomes a challenge for many children.

The school principal recommended the second-grade classroom used for this study because she felt the teacher was exemplary. The teacher had been at the school for almost 15 years and, the principal noted, followed the prescribed program and had very few management problems. The other teachers at this grade level were either new teachers or had student interns in their classrooms.

The students selected for the study were part of a larger class of 18 students that was divided into two reading groups—high and low—based on their Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests (MacGinitie & MacGinitie, 1989) and the Basic Reading Inventory (Johns, 1994) scores at the end of first grade. Students classified as proficient readers scored at or above the 50th percentile on the standardized test and read successfully at or above grade level on the reading inventory. Students classified as less proficient scored at or below the 25th percentile on the standardized test and read below grade level (pre-primer or primer level; see Table 1). Four students were randomly selected from the proficient group to participate in this study. All the students in the lower reading group were selected because there were only five of them. There were two girls and two boys in the proficient group and two girls and three boys in the less proficient group.

Data Sources

Since an important aspect of the research involved students' perceptions of themselves as readers and of the reading process, the development of richly

Table 1. Scores at the End of First Grade on Standardized Assessment and Informal Reading Inventory

Reading Level	Students	Gates-MacGinitie (percentile)	IRI Grade Level
Proficient Readers	Cathy	89	2^2
	Victoria	79	2^1
	Adam	73	2^1
	Sam	94	2^2
Less Proficient Readers	Jane	18	P
	Gwen	17	PP
	Chris	16	PP
	Justin	24	P
	Austin	17	PP

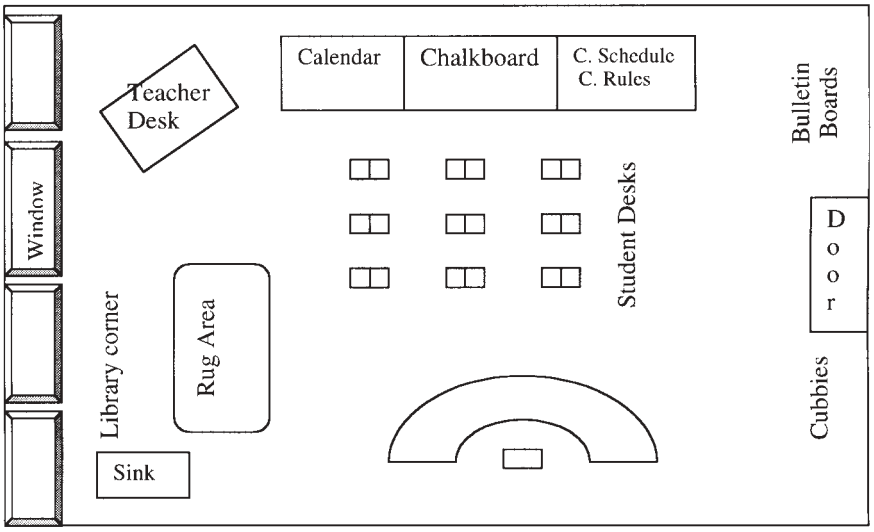
Notes: PP = Pre-primer reading level
P = Primer reading level
2^1 = Middle 2nd grade reading level
2^2 = Late 2nd grade reading level

detailed case studies in which the voices of the students emerged was considered the most appropriate method. Participant observation and in-depth interviews were used in order to discover meaning as children see it and to build theory inductively from the experiences represented by these data (Bogden & Biklen, 2003; Spradely, 1979).

Data were gathered over a period of 12 weeks in the first half of the school year. The researcher visited the classroom four days a week for 2–3 hours per day. The layout of the classroom is depicted in Figure 1.

During the language arts time (9:00–11:30 a.m.), the students participated in the morning routine and received whole class and small group reading instruction. The higher reading group students read from the literature-based basal *Literature Works* (Silver Burdett-Ginn, 1993), while students in the lower reading group read from the structured basal *A New View* (Macmillan, 1993). In addition, the students in the lower reading group were pulled out for an hour of remedial instruction in reading and math three times a week from 9:15 to 10:15 a.m. This program was called LEARN (Language Enrichment and Remediating Needs) and was developed by the school's academic intervention services. The hour was divided into 3 20-minute lesson components that consisted of recipe (phonic) patterning, reading, and Wynroth math games.

Figure 1. Layout of the Second-Grade Classroom



I wrote field notes as students worked in their respective reading groups, focusing on the literacy activities that occurred during whole class instruction. This strategy allowed me to capture full portraits of what Erickson calls taught cognitive learning (1982). He defines taught cognitive learning as instruction and learning that is deliberate and intentional, where the focus is on the "individual learner in relation to the social and cognitive milieu" (p. 150), and where there is an adaptive transaction between the environment and the individual in order to consciously acquire cognitive knowledge. To supplement these data, artifacts of teacher assignments and students' work were also collected every week.

In addition to compiling field notes and observing large and small group reading settings, I interviewed the students individually to gain an understanding of their perceptions about reading and to explore how they felt about themselves as readers. I used the Burke Reading Interview to structure these interviews (Goodman, Watson, & Burke, 1987).

I also asked each student four questions focusing specifically on their reading group experiences (questions are in the Appendix). If the children gave a one-word answer, they were asked to elaborate. These interviews were conducted during the last 2 weeks of data collection.

The teacher was not formally interviewed, but we engaged in conversations about her views on reading instruction, her perceptions of the children's abilities as readers, and any questions that arose during the ongoing analysis of data sources. All the interviews were audiotaped and subsequently transcribed by the researcher. This triangulation of data sources—interviews, field notes, and observation—helped enhance the scope, density, and clarity of interpretation (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

Data Analysis

Data analysis included examining the data for regularity and patterns using analytic induction and constant comparison methods of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This analysis resulted in preliminary coding categories which were further refined after testing the "usefulness of those categories" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003, p. 173). The interview data yielded major themes or patterns both within and across participants. Some of the major codes that emerged are identified in Table 2.

Subcodes were developed in some cases to define the contents of major codes more explicitly and concisely. For example, one major category called *definition of a good reader* was subdivided into a reader who *knows words, reads fast,* or *reads a lot.*

Codes generated from field notes (morning routine, group setup, reading orally, reading silently, spelling tests, word study, questioning, blackboard work, seat work, amount of reading, modeling, discipline, and others) were also con-

Table 2. Codes Generated by Data Analysis

All Students	Proficient Readers	Less Proficient Readers
Perception of self	Visiting the library	Giving rewards
Reading aloud	Reading many books	Giving incentives
Reading silently	Spending time reading	Discriminating
Using strategies while reading	Spending time writing	Aspiring to be a better reader
Having favorite books		
Doing spelling tests		
Doing worksheets		
Having reasons to read		

trasted and compared with the interview data codes to sharpen understandings by clustering and distinguishing observations.

A graduate student independently analyzed and coded the data to ensure soundness of the categories and the interpretations that followed. The interrater reliability was .92. All disagreements were discussed and resolved.

FINDINGS

Observations of the reading experiences provided by the high and low reading groups revealed major differences between the two groups in terms of the kinds of reading experiences that were emphasized. In addition, links were found between reading group experiences and students' perceptions of themselves as readers. Each finding will be discussed in detail.

Differences in Reading Experiences

Emphasis of Reading Instruction

The focus of instruction in the lower reading group was on the ability to recognize and sound out words. Decoding was an integral part of their reading activities. Typically these activities included students reading aloud while the teacher provided coaching, doing worksheets, syllabicating words, and identifying par-

ticular vowel and consonant sounds in words. The reading sessions typically concluded with the teacher assigning seatwork, such as additional workbook pages to be completed independently when the students returned to their seats. One example from my field notes

> Teacher hands out worksheets to be completed. Andrew is counting the number of pages. Teacher asks them to put their names on the sheets and gives them instructions on how to do them. These sheets deal with beginning sound blends. She asks the students to repeat instructions after her so they are clear about what to do. Everyone echoes the words after the teacher and practices underlining.

And in this second example:

> *Field notes, lower reading group, November 15*
>
> Teacher: Circle the blends. Let's go over the pictures on the sheet.
>
> (The students trace letters that make a long *o* sound and then circle the picture that goes with the word.)
>
> Teacher: If you remember, *o* consonant silent *e* says what sound?
>
> Gwen: o.....o
>
> Teacher: That's a long *o.* You better remember your sounds well.

Many of these day-to-day instructional activities such as "circle this" or "underline this" took on disproportionate importance and seemed inconsistent with the teacher's instructional goals. In the teacher's opinion, her main objective of reading instruction was reading for meaning, which she facilitated with many subordinate activities (circling, underlining, and others). Students in the lower reading group also had fewer opportunities to demonstrate critical comprehension. The focus was on literal meaning. For example, the questions that the teacher asked the students were mostly literal questions such as "What is the name of the main character?", "Who did Billy ask to play with him?", and "What line is the same in the poem?"

Students in the higher reading group were more often engaged in extracting meaning from the text than in decoding. Although these students also engaged in skills worksheets, these activities constituted a much smaller portion of time in the group. In fact, over a period of 10 weeks, the higher reading group used worksheets only three times compared to every day for the lower reading group. Instead, emphasis was placed not only on the students' ability to recall information from stories, but also to draw inferences and relate stories to personal experiences. The teacher asked them to think about what they would do in certain situations, tell the class about any experiences they might have had that were

similar to what they were reading, or choose some common activities that everyone engaged in every day and relate them to the story at hand. Some examples of their reading discussions include

Field notes, higher reading group, November 8

[Students have finished reading *Warrior Maiden*]
Teacher: What are the differences between Hopi Indians and the modern man?
Adam: They washed and combed their hair differently.
Sam: What does "shiny and black like a crow's wing" mean?
Teacher: This is a simile. Look at each other's hair and describe them as the author did.
Ashley: His (Adam's) hair is like the color of the grain of the door.
Cathy: Her (Gabriel's) hair is light as a snowflake.
Teacher: Good job!

Field notes, higher reading group, November 17

[They move on to the story they were reading the day before, *The Inside-Outside of Washington.* They talk about the main character, Guss, who moves from Portland, Oregon to Washington, DC. The teacher shows the architecture of Washington to the students in a book and talks about Mrs. Clinton putting the star on the top of the dome for Christmas. She goes over the different monuments. Everyone looks at the pictures eagerly.]
Teacher: This is inside the White House. This is the East Room where President Clinton has his press conferences and other meetings. This is the Capitol where laws are made. Has anyone here been to the White House? What do you think it would be like to live in the White House?

The teacher's focus on meaning and understanding was clearly reflected in the type of questions she asked.

Another activity that the higher group students often engaged in after finishing a story was creating a character sketch of the main character in the story (this occurred 70% of the time). This not only gave the students a chance to understand the story, but it was also an opportunity to develop other reading skills such as looking for details or reading for key ideas.

Time Spent Reading Aloud and Silently

Another significant difference between the two reading groups' experiences was in the emphasis on reading aloud. The lower reading group read aloud more

frequently than the higher reading group, which had opportunities to read both silently and aloud. The following two excerpts were typical of the experiences in each group:

Field notes from higher reading group, November 8

[Students read the text silently (4 minutes).]
Teacher: Where do you think all the boys and men have gone?
Victoria: They have gone to the field to cut the crop.
Teacher: Let's read some more.
[Teacher assigns roles to the students and they read their parts aloud.]

Field notes from lower reading group, December 9

Teacher: Now we will read the story for today. Title of the story or the name of our book is what?
Austin: *Bob and the Big Bag.*
[Teacher repeats the title and asks students to open at page 1.]
Teacher: I am looking for sounding and blending; I am looking for finger pointing and…
Annie you begin.
[Students start taking turns reading aloud]

Comments from the less proficient readers indicated that they could read better when they read silently, but they rarely had an opportunity to do so (just 8% of their total reading time was devoted to silent reading). For example, in an interview Chris said, "I like reading silently because then you can concentrate. When I read silently, I can get the meaning more easily." Justin, another student in the less proficient group, echoed Chris' view: "I prefer reading silently because then I don't lose my place easily. I can concentrate better."

Some students in the less proficient group did find reading aloud "fun"; it was an activity where "you can change your voice." All the reasons given for reading aloud were, however, related to oral performance.

Students in the higher group had mixed responses to reading orally and silently. They liked reading orally to improve expression and preferred reading silently when they were doing serious reading. As Sam and Adam explained in this excerpt from their interview,

Sam: I like reading silently better because it's a better way of reading, and you are not bothering other people in reading out loud.
Researcher: Anything else?
Sam: I also like reading silently better because I don't have to talk and I can focus. Sometimes I do like to read out loud to the class, especially poems but not very often. Also because sometimes they are making too much noise and I get distracted, I lose my place very quickly.

Adam: Sometimes I like reading silently and sometimes aloud because sometimes I want silence to understand and sometimes I want it loud to express myself or tell my brother.

These students' reading group experiences appear to be aligned with their group membership in terms of the emphasis of instruction: for the lower reading group, the emphasis was on oral reading and decoding words; for the higher reading group, the emphasis was on meaning making and reading both silently and aloud. In the next section of this paper, I will describe students' perceptions of themselves as readers and show that these self-perceptions are related to their reading group experiences.

Self-Perceptions as Readers and Group Membership

The proficient and less proficient second-grade readers in this study held widely disparate views of reading and of themselves as readers. The students in the lower reading group were clearly aware of their need to improve their reading, as evident in one of the less proficient reader's responses:

Researcher: Do you consider yourself a good reader?
Justin: There are too many hard words in there [book]. Those hard words like um…"patients" and you know, you can't just remember the words and then I get mixed up with the words. I have to practice reading over and over.

The less proficient readers also stressed "reading a lot" (60%), "spelling long and hard words" (80%), and "reading fast and fluently" (80%) as the major characteristics of a proficient reader. They said, for example,

Researcher: What makes someone a good reader?
Austin: He reads a lot. He is smart, his reading is good, and he makes very few mistakes.
Justin: Um…not get stuck at any words, read the words fluently.
Jane: You should read a lot, read any book that you can get. You should kind of practice a lot so that you do not make any mistakes.
Chris: Someone who reads well, who can read fast, and knows all the words.

These responses indicate a focus on recognizing and reading words automatically during oral reading activities; in fact, the less proficient readers did not appear to perceive meaning as being integrally important to reading. Only one student, Gwen, suggested that her ability to understand what she read could be used as a measure of her reading ability: "Sometimes I have difficulty understanding some of the words, what they mean. But I keep trying till I understand what the words and the story means."

Less proficient readers did not mention comprehension, even when they talked about how they would help a student having difficulty learning to read. Their comments about how they would help another student provided more evidence that they perceived reading to be about decoding and that good readers are good at sounding out words—a reflection of their own reading group experiences. They said, for example,

> Chris: I would tell him to sound it out, ask someone or if someone is not there, then tell him the word.
> Justin: I would tell them to try to sound them out and to try their best at sounding out and if they need any more help to just come and see me.
> Austin: Talk quiet and keep reading. Sound out the work, and if he doesn't get the work I'll tell him the word.

Jane, a student in the lower reading group, gave a very interesting and unexpected answer to the same question:

> I'll like, maybe you could tell them to practice reading a little more and then they might get a little better. But then in a little while if they don't get better or read anymore, you might like give them a couple…like worksheets, like papers, a little book which they should try reading a couple of times and it's kind of hard for them, then somebody in the class could read it to them really good. If they have not been studying, then at the end of the year the teacher can give them about 2, 3, 4 books and if they don't have them all done, they would have to do them for the next year. If they did get them all done, they would have to give back to the teacher, and the teacher has to listen to them read a bit from each book. If they had all different stories, they would have to read one different story from each book.

In my discussion with her about her response, I found out that she had been asked to do similar things in her previous school. She felt very strongly about her suggestions and was sure that they would be helpful because they had worked for her. She was the only student in the lower reading group who expressed a desire to be in the higher reading group and worked towards that goal.

Reading for Jane was not simply sounding out each word, even though her reading was often characterized by that. It was much more than that. She thought that when one "practices a lot," "reads a lot," and "focuses on the words," one becomes a proficient reader. Other students in her group did not express the same sentiments. "Sounding out" was by far the most frequently mentioned approach by the students in the low group.

> Chris: I try to sound it out and I try to see the word, and if I say some-

thing that sounds like the word I think, then that's the word.

Justin mentioned two strategies:

> I really sound them out most of the times. Sometimes I just read it right over again because if I don't read it so fast, sometimes like if I go back, I get it.

A frequently employed strategy of circumventing sounding out words was asking someone:

> Austin: If it's a big word, then I say "Mother! Mother! Mother! Billy! Billy! Daddy! Daddy! Anthony! Elisha! Elisha!" I ask any of them.
> Jane: Sometimes when I am reading, I just focus on the word; I try to sound it out.
> Justin: It's really easy if you think a little bit and you get the words right. When you get the words right, you are learning a new thing like you are learning to read harder words as you sound them out and you do your best.
> Chris: Words. I focus on the words because they really help you read.
> Jane: Sometimes when I am reading, I just focus on the word; I just try to sound it out.

For these less proficient students who perceived themselves as having difficulty learning to read, reading was about tackling the words. If they could decode the words, they could be proficient readers.

By contrast, students in the high reading group considered themselves to be proficient readers, as the responses of these students reveal:

> Researcher: Do you consider yourself a good reader? Why?
> Victoria: Yes, I really read a lot—like five books every day. I read a lot.
> Sam: Yes, I got lots of books at home and I read a lot. [his emphasis] I enjoy reading. When I go home, I sometimes keep reading all the time till I go to bed. I like it. I feel I am the best reader in the class. I hardly ever get stuck on words in the books.
> Cathy: I think the way I read is good. I can spell out hard words…and I read a lot. I like to read Dr. Seuss books sometimes. I can read the long ones too; I read the really long one—*Green Eggs and Ham.*

These students expressed views about how they would help students having difficulty that were similar to the kind of instruction they received in their reading group, as noted in these representative excerpts from transcripts:

> Victoria: I would just tell them to try to read on and when they get stuck, to read the little word in the big word. They could also put down the words they did not know and ask their parents or teacher

later. They could also try to spell them out and really study them well, and then I could also ask them to take the book and try to read the story.
Adam: I would keep on reading the book to them over and over again and the next day do the same thing. This way they would remember the words in the book that I read to them, and then I would do it another day. Or, I would tell them the word and ask him to say it after me, and I would tell him the words when he got stuck on them.
Sam: I would make him read the text again and help him out with it when he got stuck on any word. I would tell him to figure it out [word], and if he is unable to, then I will tell him and he can repeat after me.

The strategies to help students having difficulty learning to read suggested by students in the proficient reading group emphasized meaning making—the same emphasis in the instruction they received in their reading group. The suggestion for a nonreader to read the text again and again is an excellent strategy, since repeated reading is pivotal to improving one's reading. As Bridge (1979) states, "it is only through practice in reading that children can learn to be efficient predictors of meaning and economical users of visual information" (p. 504). This was quite a contrast, however, to the responses of the students in the lower reading group, who suggested "sounding out" as the most important strategy to improve one's reading.

DISCUSSION

The patterns in the data suggest that the proficient and less proficient readers had different perceptions of themselves as readers, and these perceptions were related to differences in their reading group experiences. The lower-achieving readers focused on reading skills and decoding in their group and came to regard themselves as struggling readers who needed to improve the ways they figured out words. These results parallel Borko and Eiesenhart's (1986) findings. Students in the higher-achieving group engaged in reading for meaning and viewed themselves as proficient readers with multiple strategies at their disposal once they came to difficult words.

DeStefano, Pepinsky, and Sanders (1982) attribute this difference in focus to the nature of reading materials, which affects and influences interaction during lessons. In their study, they found that differences in discourse of the two reading groups was a reflection of the nature of curricular activities in the groups. The students in the lower reading group worked with worksheets for the most part and only rarely read from texts. When they did read and discuss, "mostly the talk centered on stages or actions, with a relatively heavy, accompanying reference to objects. There was rarely talk about process…none of the

respondents, including the teacher, was stylistically complicated in his or her utterances" (p. 124).

The big differences in focus of curricular activities also make the reading groups operate as closed systems of learning. The groups with their mutually reinforcing beliefs and practices do not provide the students an opportunity to move from one group to another, to think differently about reading, or to see themselves as readers.

CONCLUSION

Children develop an understanding of themselves as readers based on what goes on around them. The types of reading experiences they have define reading and tell them how proficient they are. The differences in their reading experiences do not go unnoticed by the students, as Jane, a student in the less proficient group, observed:

> *Field notes, November 10*
>
> They [students in the higher group] do a lot of work back there and they think about stuff and they write a lot, and we up here just do our papers. When they finish their papers, they can go and read on the rug, not us.

This case study describes the experience of nine students in one classroom. Longitudinal studies are needed to add further detail to what we are learning about the impact of reading experiences on self-perception. Such studies may begin to suggest what can be done to change the self-perception of less proficient readers so that they too can develop positive literate identities.

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APPENDIX

Interview Questions Focusing on Students Reading Group Experiences

1) Which reading group do you belong to?

2) How do you feel about being in your reading group?

3) What kinds of reading activities do you do every day?

4) What do you think about students in the other group?