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**Academic Grandparents: Things They Never Thought to Tell Us**

**Donna Alvermann**

**George Hruby**

**Christine Mallozzi**

**Mona Matthews**

**Gary Moorman**

**David Reinking**

## **Introduction**

**Gary Moorman**

I was honored when Donna Alvermann offered me the opportunity to chair the Panel “**Academic Grandparents: Things They Never Thought to Tell Us**” at the 2015 annual conference of the American Reading Forum. This was a co-sponsored session with the Reading Hall of Fame, a somewhat mysterious group of outstanding reading scholars and educators. Information about the group can be found at their website:

<http://www.readinghalloffame.org/>

Donna’s plan was to examine the impact of “academic grandparents,” exploring the impact of our predecessors in moving our field forward. What role their accomplishments should play is seldom brought under scrutiny. As Donna writes in the proposal “With all due respect for our predecessors, the panel opts to raise questions about that role in current times.”

In the presentation, four scholars chose a metaphorical academic grandparent, one who had impact on their professional growth, especially initially in their careers. None of the presenters had ever met their grandparent in person, their acquaintance based solely on written texts. At the end of the four presentations, a fifth scholar, who had seen written drafts of each of the four presentations, reacted.

The presentations and the essays in this manuscript were built around three key questions:

- 1. What’s the trade off between carrying the past forward and reconfiguring it to envision or generate the new?**
- 2. To what degree would our academic grandparents likely rebel?**

**3. If we could engage in conversation with our academic forebears at the end of this panel session, what might we gain collectively?**

These essays, considering the highly academic and philosophical content, are surprisingly readable. To capture this and hopefully set the stage for your reading them, I will provide only the grandchild, grandparent (along with dates of birth and death), and a brief quote from each essay that personally I found particularly insightful, provocative and/or humorous.

Donna Alvermann. Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) French existential philosopher:

Considering that Simone de Beauvoir and I were separated at birth by two generations and two continents—to say nothing of the social, familial, disciplinary, and linguistic disconnects between us—it is little wonder that I marveled to myself when her name came instantly to mind as my metaphoric grandparent when I think about digital media literacy education.

George Hruby. Richard Rorty (1931-2007) American neo-pragmatist philosopher:

Both (conservative and liberal intuitions) hold that education is about truth and freedom; but conservatives believe you teach the truth so students can be free; liberals believe you teach to free the student so they can know the truth.

Mona Matthews. Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) Russian social psychologist:

Given the central role Vygotsky (1962) gave to language, he likely would rebel against instructional programs and US educational policies that by design constrain children's use of language. These include early reading programs, such as Success For All (Success for All Foundation), that deliver instruction via scripts teachers must deliver verbatim, and English-only policies that mandate that English be the only language used in schools to deliver instruction.

Christine Mallozzi. Michel Foucault (1926-1984) French trans-disciplinary philosopher:

To me, it seems that Foucault's favorite activity was to be obtuse, so the most likely thing he would do is to not rebel at my claiming him in my academic lineage, perhaps because rebelling is what we might expect of him.

David Reinking. Reactor:

Are we too obtuse in our scholarly work removing it too far from the pragmatic day-to-day challenges of advancing literacy in schools and classrooms? Are those challenges too prosaic to meet our intellectual needs? Do the intellectual stances identified in this collection of grandparents do real work in classrooms and/or the policy arena?

I hope these “trailers” provide a quick preview to these five wonderful essays.

During the discussion after the presentations at the conference, it was suggested that it would be great if the four grandparents could sit around a table and have a discussion, not unlike what these essays present. It was agreed that in all likelihood the four would wear black turtlenecks. I invite you to put on a metaphorical black turtleneck and engage in a discussion with these academic titans.

### **Simone de Beauvoir: Grandparent of Digital Media Literacy Education**

**Donna Alvermann**

Considering that Simone de Beauvoir and I were separated at birth by two generations and two continents—to say nothing of the social, familial, disciplinary, and linguistic disconnects between us—I still marvel at the fact that her name came instantly to mind as my metaphoric grandparent in digital media literacy education. Given that Simone de Beauvoir was no longer living when 21<sup>st</sup> century digital technologies became commonplace, how could her work possibly connect to digital media literacy education? The connection lies not with the digital but with de Beauvoir’s commitment to the existentialist concept of individual freedom.

**Key question 1: What’s the trade off between carrying the past forward and reconfiguring it to envision or generate the new?**

During most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a time in which de Beauvoir was active, mass media was on the rise. It was a time in which relatively few individuals could expect to reach large audiences in any single broadcast. Enter the digital age and its expansion of “the possibilities for individual participation in the growth and...realization of a truly democratic culture” (Balkin, 2004, p. 1). However reconfiguring the past and its emphasis on mass media produces its own set of controls that can limit freedom of speech and democratic participation. As Balkin goes on to say, “Safeguarding freedom of speech will thus increasingly fall to legislatures, administrative agencies, and technologists” (p.1).

I would argue that Simone de Beauvoir ran up against similar threats aimed at muting her voice. Case in point: While writing *The Blood of Others*, which was published in 1948, de Beauvoir is said to have worked out “her intention to express the paradox of freedom experienced by an individual and the ways in which others, perceived by the individual as objects, were affected by [that individual’s] actions and decisions” (Bair 1990, p. 305). This fictionalized account of de Beauvoir’s personal experiences in Paris during World War II, explores her commitment to the existentialist concept of individual freedom. When her book appeared in the United States, it was lauded by most as being a fictional primer on essentialism and de Beauvoir as being “the most Existential of all the Existentialists” (Bair, 1990, p. 306).

*The Blood of Others* was not without its critics, however. Richard McLaughlin (1948), a reviewer writing for the *Saturday Review of Literature*, raised serious doubts about “the ultimate achievement of [a state of pure individual freedom], since if the existentialists insist on total responsibility they also urge total involvement” (p. 13). Following this line of reasoning in regard to total involvement, McLaughlin argued, would



make it virtually impossible for anyone to remain untouched by the resolve of others. In fact, attempting to do so would deny a basic existentialist tenet, namely, that other people possess the *same* desire for total responsibility for their decisions and actions. This paradox, of course, has implications for media literacy education, especially in instances involving contested rights over individual freedom.

**Key question 2: To what degree would our academic grandparents likely rebel?**

Despite finding Simone de Beauvoir's writing on existential liberation relevant for my work in digital media literacies education, I am aware that she would likely rebel at the thought of my using the video "Webcam 101 for Seniors" in my online course titled New and Digital Literacies, LLED 7910e. But first, some background on this video.

Writing as a scholar of new materialisms, Sonia Kruks (2010) uses de Beauvoir's experiences of the infirmities and oppressions she encountered in advancing age to illustrate how they provide insight into "the cultural and discursive media we produce" (p. 262). Specifically, Kruks calls attention to how society in a for-profit economy is largely responsible for the degradations of old age that devalue people who are no longer economically productive. Citing de Beauvoir's allusion to the aged as "pure objects" (p. 271), Kruks goes on to explain how exterior forces (e.g., the media) that make fun of old people and their infirmities by materially objectifying them as "useless...not worthy of respect" (p. 271) can lead to oldsters interiorizing those same labels.

A case in point that links this situation to digital media literacy is a popular YouTube video that went viral in September 2011. Titled "Webcam 101 for Seniors," this video had a hit rate of 11,910,266 views as of November 17, 2015. The full version of the video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcN08Tg3PWw>) was uploaded by the retired

couple's granddaughter who had tried to teach Bruce and Esther Huffman from McMinnville, Oregon, how to record themselves using Esther's new laptop. Within four days of their repeated fumbling and eventual success (though unbeknownst to them), their video had attracted over 2.2 million views, according to OregonLive.com (<http://goo.gl/foDc92>).

Labeled as “adorable” by OregonLive.com on September 15, 2011, the couple's display of advancing age and their cheerful online acceptance of being “computer illiterate” is a prime example of how de Beauvoir's work can be made relevant by educators today. For example, I have used it as a critical literacy activity that invites students in my online New and Digital Literacies course to explore who was Othered by whom, for what reason, and with what possible gain. Further discussion has sometimes led to exploring the tensions between personal freedom and social responsibility—an activity that has the potential to backfire and reinforce the very stereotypes I am trying to disrupt.

**Key question 3: If we could engage in conversation with our academic forebears at the end of this panel session, what might we gain collectively?**

Perhaps if the academic forebears of the other three presenters were to join us in a post-session conversation, we would find one or more taking exception to my claim that Simone de Beauvoir's work has relevance for 21<sup>st</sup> century media literacy education. It is also possible they would point to several missed opportunities for linking de Beauvoir's work in the political arena and her travels abroad (e.g., to Havana, Cuba) to media literacy education. What I would be most interested in learning from a post-session discussion is this: Would de Beauvoir and the other three panelists' metaphoric academic grandparents

take offense at our proposing and then presenting this particular panel discussion at the American Reading Forum?

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### **Richard Rorty: The Grandparent Who Told Us We'd Poke Our Eye Out**

**George Hruby**

My first encounter with the work of American neo-pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty was as an undergraduate philosophy minor (English major) by way of his edited volume on the linguistic turn in Anglo-analytic philosophy (Rorty, 1967). The book summarized the discursive post-positivism that followed the collapse of logical positivism in the 1950s, and the alternative epistemic foundations for making truth claims entertained in its wake. I did not read his *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Rorty, 1979) until the late 1990s, but knew of Rorty's neo-pragmatist critique of linguistic representation and his disparagement of philosophy as a knowledge legitimation project. This was largely



through essay-length Rorty, and it was the impact of a collection of his essays (Rorty, 1989) that prompted my application to graduate school.

Recently, I have been reflecting on Rorty's few but uncanny essays on the culture wars surrounding educational reform (e.g., Rorty, 1987, 1990, 1999). I believe his seemingly simple analysis, though now three decades old, still has merit, and is useful for negotiating conversations with educational stakeholders holding different ideological convictions than my own. As the director of a statewide literacy professional development center, and in order to maintain the center's funding, I am regularly required to find common ground with members of the state educational bureaucracy, the legislature, the state Chamber of Commerce, and an assortment of generally conservative ad hoc advocacy groups. I also communicate regularly with rank-and-file teachers, administrators, parents, and, best of all, students who have come to college to become a teacher like the teachers they had. The overwhelming majority of these people hold conventional views on what schools and learning are about, views notably distinct from the more rarified constructs we advocate from the academy. Rorty's ideas have helped me bridge this divide in ways that are effective without robbing me of a good night's sleep.

**Key question 1: What's the trade off between carrying the past forward and reconfiguring it to envision or generate the new?**

This is a strikingly Rortian question. For Rorty, as for Faulkner (1950/1975), the past is never dead or even past. Convention in language, as in belief and practice, is requisite for community and thus meaning. So, although it is morally necessary (and always desirable, indeed, a Rortian obsession) to freshen things up with new vocabularies, new arguments, new arrangements, these must be relatable to deep and over-inscribed

networks of conventional expectation in order to have any value or function as language or social practice (Rorty, 1989). To extend a well-worn metaphor, we rebuild the boat as we sail it, one plank at a time, yet regardless are perpetually at sea. The adolescent belief in absolute freedom from a presumed (but in fact ever changing) status quo is naïve (Rorty, 1999). We can never be entirely free from conventional assumption. We can at best displace certain elements, repositioning sets of conventionalities with alternative sets, even though, upon closer examination, these will often turn out to be functionally similar to what we displaced. Nonetheless, we should refuse to settle for the merely comfortable and remain ironically hopeful that we can make displacements on behalf of inflicting less cruelty and promoting greater happiness than before (Rorty, 1989, 2000).

**Key question 2: To what degree would our academic grandparents likely rebel?**

In response to two works of educational philosophy inspired by his ideas (Arcilla, 1990; Nicholson, 1989), Rorty noted “the dangers of over-philosophication” (Rorty, 1990, title). I love this 8-syllable mouthful of a word, indicating the headful of ideas with which we often distract ourselves while more urgent fires are burning.

Philosophy hasn’t much to say about education, argued Rorty (1990), because education is a technical domain addressing technical issues requiring technical expertise (the sort we have as scholars of education). Not having that expertise, himself, Rorty felt it would be foolish for him to address those issues. As to our (perhaps compensatory) concern for epistemological foundations, from the standpoint of a neo-pragmatist like Rorty, the assumptions we bring to bear in addressing our technical questions must pay their own freight, that is, they are justified only in so far as they get us the results we seek, what James (1907) figuratively termed their cash-value. If not, we must seek or fashion

new assumptions. And, in any case, philosophy is no longer the place to find epistemological certainty (Rorty, 1979), so you education kids get off his philosophical lawn!

However, Rorty (1999, 2000) observed that not *all* questions surrounding education are technical questions. There are, in fact, public questions of social value and meaning, and these kinds of questions are at the core of the culture wars surrounding education and its reform. What sort of a nation are we, and what sort of nation do we wish to become? What sorts of people do we want our children to grow up to be? What sort of society do we hope they will live in? What role do we imagine education playing in these outcomes?

These are not, properly speaking, technical questions, and thus are fair game for general discussion and philosophical interrogation. In such a public discussion, our technical expertise as scholars of education is irrelevant. It provides us no basis by which to preempt social conversation on these issues, as if our fellow citizens were potential students upon whom we could impose our sense of professional prerogative, calling them to order so that we might correct and control their self-constructed understandings. Instead, to engage in a public conversation, we actually have to listen, not just to seem polite while we await an opportunity to correct the mistaken, but to listen so as to actually *hear* and respect the conventional assumptions, values, and intuitions at play in the worldviews of others, perchance, at least for brief moments, to empathize with their sensibilities, even as we may disagree with the conclusions to which they arrive.

**Rortian Resistance.** As a philosopher, Rorty's work was regularly cross-examined and challenged by other philosophers, and his analyses are widely engaged across the



philosophical spectrum, including in educational philosophy (e.g., Peters & Ghiraldelli, 2001). Ramberg (2009) summed up the substantive arguments with Rorty's ideas succinctly: "Rorty's conversationalist view of truth and knowledge leaves us entirely unable to account for the notion that a reasonable view of how things are is a view suitably constrained by how the world actually is" (n.p.). Rorty would disagree.

Philosophical debate is different from what we mean by *criticality* in the dialectical sense employed in education. So I will disregard the dismissal of Rorty due to a purported inadequacy of radical chic (e.g., Archilla, 1995, p. x, criticized Rorty for his residual "positivist impatience with existential mystery"). More seriously, Reich (1996) voiced a concern for Rorty's elitism.

Rorty's seeming reservation of the ironic stance for those who have had the benefits of a liberal arts curriculum seems elitist, classist, and in its description narcissistic. Rorty allowed that most people were perfectly happy living lives neatly fenced by conventional assumption. Given his utilitarian approval of the pursuit of happiness, provided it did not contribute to the misery of others, who were academics to disabuse conventionalists for their supposed false consciousness? In any case, the default to "commonsensically nominalist and historicist" (Rorty, 1989, 73), but not ironic, truth claims was as typical of university professors as of Walmart employees. Being keenly aware of one's inability to be certain is hardly a common attribute of the professional class. Yet I still struggle with his calling out academics like myself for our desire to be the more knowledgeable others (Rorty, 1994).

**Key question 3: If we could engage in conversation with our academic forebears at the end of this panel session, what might we gain collectively?**

I believe Rorty would have fun with us, delighted that he had a second chance to make more friends (Rorty, 2007), share language play, and gently lead our thinking to places it had neither been before nor would likely have gone. He would remind us of the crucial need for empathy to hear other voices than our own. He might suggest we are so taken up with getting our message out, advocating, lecturing, conferencing, proselytizing, elevator speechifying, blogging, and otherwise broadcasting our demands and promoting our careers, we never spend much time actually listening to others, particularly those beyond our hallowed halls but at the mercy of our teacher education systems. Nor do we listen to realize anything like the solidarity necessary for a better world.

Rorty suggested there are discernably different conservative and liberal intuitions informing the culture wars surrounding education in the US. Both hold that education is about truth and freedom. But conservatives believe you teach the truth (how the world works) so students can be free (to realize their destinies in the world). Liberals believe you teach to free the student (of their false consciousness, their unexamined assumptions) so they can know the truth (who and where they are). Conservatives are comparatively absolutist about the truth, but more ambivalent about freedom (at least for others), while liberals are the opposite – that is, they are comparatively absolutist about freedom (especially for others), but more relativist about truth (Rorty, 1999).

Since there are no absolute truths, according to Rorty (1979, 1999), what conservatives are really proposing is to inculcate the young in the conventionalities that the parental generation would have students take to be true, or, in other words for conservatives, *socialization* is the purpose of education. For historical reasons (local control of the schools, caution regarding children), this view dominates in the K-12 school

curriculum (Rorty, 1999). In some quarters we are now calling this “college and career readiness.”

On the other liberal hand, as noted, Rorty (1990, 1999) denied there could be freedom from accepted convention, only a displacement of parochial conventionalities with alternative, fresher ones. And this, he argued, is what pertains in the non-vocational postsecondary curriculum. The alternatives are numerous, moreover, and across the liberal arts and sciences the student encounters many different possibilities. Finding the ones that make the most sense for the student essentially amounts to education as *individuation* (Rorty, 2000). Eventually, of course, some semblance of vocational preparation forces college students to accept the institutionally determined conventions of a professional discourse. But that discourse will be appropriated on behalf of a professional persona, not of the self, and with suitable reflection, humility, and empathy, the space between the persona and the self will prove the breeding ground for compassionate irony.

Thus, according to Rorty (2000), *socialization* followed by *individualization* is the de facto compromise in American education, and although there are exceptions, they either must duck or else be the target of societal refusal. Extremists aside, most Americans of either ideological stripe are comfortable with a secondary curriculum that prepares the student for a useful and effective role in society. And most who are able to see their own children to college for a liberal arts foundation expect their children’s sense of possibility to be enlarged so that they may live a richer, more meaningful life. Or at least have a finer lease on the discourses of power. When either the K-12 (conservative) or post-sec (liberal) view tries to colonize the other (make post-sec about conventional pragmatics or K-12



about personal liberation), societal pushback defeats the effort. Which may go some way in explaining the historical impact of teacher education's visions of educational reform.

Rorty's guidance on the liberal and conservative intuitions about education has helped me to empathize with those who hold opposite intuitions from my own, even as I disagree with their conclusions. I note that Rorty's ideas were subsequently substantiated by psychological research on consistent value differences between self-labeled conservatives and liberals (e.g., Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2007), and by more recent social science research on the best way to convince someone from an opposite ideological stance to arrive at the results you would prefer (hint: start from *their* intuited truths and values as the foundational basis for your argument, not your own; Feinberg & Willer, 2015). Rorty would not be surprised at this finding, because he held that the foundations we often take as determinative of our conclusions are really not.

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## **Lev S. Vygotsky: The Grandparent Who Encouraged Me to Hang Out with More Knowledgeable Others**

**Mona Matthews**

I found identifying my academic grandparent difficult. For two decades, my reading and research have deepened as well as broadened my theoretical beliefs, so I struggled with identifying a singular influence. However, once I considered that grandparents are second-degree relatives, with grandchildren sharing only 25% of their grandparents' genetic make-up, I settled on Vygotsky.. From Vygotsky I inherited a belief that learning is a social enterprise (Wertsch, 1991) with individuals learning about the world and the values of their culture through their day-to-day interactions with the more experienced members of their community.

My introduction to Vygotsky occurred in the early 80's when I entered graduate school. Then, as well as now, my professional study is motivated by a need to understand early literacy development, particularly reading acquisition. When I entered graduate school, Vygotsky's ideas were beginning to weigh substantial influence on conceptions of

learning and teaching and as such gave support to the emerging views of beginning reading as a process that begins at birth. As a consequence, researchers, such as Sulzby (1985) and Ferreiro and Teberosky (1982) turned their investigative eye towards examining young children's understandings of print while others sought to understand ways that families used print in their day-to-day lives (for example Taylor, 1986). For me, Vygotsky's theory brought order to my nascent views of how young children become literate and focused my attention on children's interactions with print within classroom settings. With this as background, I address the three questions that frame this problems court.

**Key question 1: What's the trade-off between carrying the past forward and reconfiguring it to envision or generate the new?**

When I consider this question within a Vygotskian framework for learning, I see no trade-off. Rather bringing the past forward and reconfiguring it could stand as a succinct, albeit simplistic, illustration of Vygotsky's conception of the learning process. The past, considered within this context, loosely reflects historical as well as developmental aspects of a performance; a performance that moves forward, yet embedded within its current expression. Thereby, reconfigured, reflecting an across-time response to changing contexts likely resulting in alterations in the use of tools, and nudged by the artful guidance of a more knowledgeable other (MKO). Vygotsky depicted this process in his description of teaching within young children's ZPD (1978).

In fact, I offer this process, i.e., carrying the past forward and reconfiguring it to envision or generate the new, as a way to explain how Vygotsky's ideas have travelled through time. For example, Hatano (1993) proposed the inclusion of core Piagetian

constructivist assumptions to create a “constructivist Vygotskian conception” (p. 155). Palincsar and Brown (1984) incorporated several aspects of Vygotsky’s theory in their design of Reciprocal Teaching, including the importance of dialogue, the need to situate instruction within a social context, and the value of adult support. Lave and Wenger (1991) appropriated his ideas in their construct of legitimate peripheral participation, wherein new members of a community gain knowledge of essential tasks by working alongside more experienced members of the community.

However, as I carried forward Vygotsky’s ideas related to the social and cultural influences on early literacy learning, I began to find they lacked the depth I sought. This led me to search for theories and research describing human development. Although elements of these theories and research were familiar--all maintained Vygotsky’s focus on social and cultural origins of learning—others offered more depth in explaining how these origins influence children’s learning. To illustrate, I offer a brief discussion of where I found such depth.

Terrence Deacon (1997), a biological anthropologist, in his book *The Symbolic Species*, addresses the question “Why are humans the only species to have its own language?” To answer this question he examines how the evolution of language results from human’s unique capacity for symbolic representation. This capacity enables humans to create, “symbolically mediated models of things- whether theories, stories, or just rationally argued predictions” (p. 434).

Tomasello (2000) in collaboration with others (Tomasello, Carpenter, Cal, Behne, & Moll, 2005; Tomasello, Kruger, & Ratner, 1993) explain how humans possess the ability to understand and share the intentions of others, to be mind readers, so to speak.



This ability, emerges around nine months, and enables the infant to focus on the intended goal of another's behavior. Around 12 months, the toddler begins to attend to the strategies the person uses to achieve that goal. Around age four, the young child's intention sharing evolves into an ability to share the beliefs of others. This is referenced as "collective intentionality," (Searle, 1995, as cited in Tomasello, et al., 2005, p. 684) wherein the child shares similar understandings of the rules, social norms, that guide the behavior of those within their community (Tomasello, et al.,). Tomasello (2000) references this process as the bedrock of cultural learning.

Tomasello (2003) in his book *Constructing a Language*, proposes a usage-based view of language development wherein children learn language by using language. This ability to construct language while they use language results from two powerful cognitive processes. One is their ability to read the intentions of others, described previously, and the other is their ability to find and form patterns, which enables them to acquire increasingly expanded patterns of that language. These two processes provide young children with more powerful learning mechanisms than previously believed, and raise questions about the validity of theories, such as that proposed by Chomsky (1977), which purport infants possess an instinctive capacity to learn language.

Finally, Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) offers a comprehensive and detailed explanation of how humans grow and develop across time (Thelen & Smith, 1994). From a DST perspective, the human represents a dynamic developing system that changes across time as a consequence of the interaction of all available components within and outside the body (Thelen & Smith, 2006, p. 258). These components interact and change asynchronously, occurring at different rates, and nonlinearly, occurring with spurts,

regressions, plateaus, (Thelen & Smith, 1994, p. 85). A DST offers literacy researchers a reference when looking for answers to questions such as, what makes literacy learning nonlinear? How do changes that occur in a child's literacy development become more complex over time? How do behaviors seemingly unrelated to reading and writing-- invented spelling, emergent reading-- appear to emerge suddenly into a coherent understanding of what written language represents?

**Key question 2: To what degree would our academic grandparents likely rebel?**

Vygotsky would likely not support all uptakes of his ideas. In fact, some likely would lead him to wage an all-out rebellion. One of the most obvious is the use of the ZPD by the Accelerated Reader Program (Renaissance Learning), a program widely used in classroom across the U.S. This program uses the STAR assessment system to identify books within students' ZPD, defined as books identified as neither too easy nor too difficult. Even though teachers are encouraged to use their professional knowledge, a computer program, not the classroom teacher, identifies books at students' ZPD, sets individual goals for each student, and monitors students' comprehension. Thereby, it relinquishes key aspects of the ZPD such as mediation, scaffolding, MKO, to a computer program.

Given the central role Vygotsky (1962) gave to language, he likely would rebel against instructional programs and U.S. educational policies that by design constrain children's use of language. These include early reading programs, such as Success For All (Success for All Foundation), that deliver instruction via scripts teachers must deliver verbatim, and English-only policies that mandate that English be the only language used in schools to deliver instruction. These practices and policies not only run counter to the

central role Vygotsky ascribes to language, they run counter to the Marxist ideology that grounded his work (Wertsch, 1985). The latter would likely lead him to view these practices and policies as implemented by the elite to maintain social order and retain their privilege.

**Key question 3: If we could engage in conversation with our academic forebears at the end of this panel session, what might we gain collectively?**

Vygotsky died at the age of 37, so the primary responsibility for explaining, testing, and detailing his theory and their pedagogical applications fell to others (for example, Wertsch, 1991). Further, most have learned about Vygotsky's ideas by reading translations of his writings rather than the originals (for example, Cole: Vygotsky, 1978; Hanfmann & Vakar: Vygotsky, 1962). Thus, I wonder, how would he critique their translations? Also given, that in the time since Vygotsky's death, some of the same psychological tools he knew, although available today, such as books, maps, writing utensils, etc. have evolved to produce new forms and functions. Moreover, their availability has expanded across economic strata. How would Vygotsky revise his theories to account for the evolution of these psychological tools and their expanded access? Finally, Vygotsky focused on social and cultural origins of learning and applied a genetic analysis to develop his theory (Genetic Roots of Thought and Speech, n.d.). Marie Clay (2001) acknowledges but offers little explanation of the influence of social and cultural origins of learning, yet she was a careful researcher who provided detailed accounts of how young children change over time in their reading development. What advice might they offer to each other?

Considering the prevalence of Vygotsky's ideas and theory and their application in current conceptions of teaching and learning, I am certain many at ARF would be interested in Vygotsky's responses to these questions. My guess is that he would be equally as interested to engage in conversation with the academic grandparents of my fellow presenters.

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## **Michel Foucault: The Grandpere Who Seemed to Forget Women Have Bodies, Too**

**Christine Mallozzi**

It may have begun in fourth grade with Madam Berkley, then later with Madam Horton, Madam Cauvin, and Madam Robana who taught me to love the French language and French culture with a capital amour. As I got older, I realized that being an American Francophile meshed nicely with my own self-loathing. Like Groucho Marx, “I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member,” so I pine after a culture who certainly would never accept me fully, as the waiter at La Tour d’Argent made apparent when he asked if I would *please* stop speaking French to him.

Thus, my unsteady relationship with my Grandpere Michel Foucault is no surprise to me. Indeed, Foucault has posthumously met resistance from many women scholars, most who I count as a generation ahead of me, my metaphorical parents. In Hekman’s (1996) edited volume titled *Feminist Interpretations of Michel Foucault*, women such as Butler and Alcoff took Foucault to task for what he did or did not do, could or could not do for a still nascent Third Wave feminism. In *Disciplining Foucault*, Sawicki (1991) examined Foucault’s work regarding feminism, sexuality, power, and motherhood, and proposed that feminists’ differences from Foucault should not be a wedge but a starting point to form coalitions among speaking feminist subjects. Just like many siblings use



holiday gatherings to bond over emotional buttons pressed by the previous generation, Sawicki reminds me that Foucault's work can strengthen feminists' resolve to speak their own truths. And yes, the grandparents' generation may drive the parents' generation crazy but remain entertaining, warm, and inviting to the grandchildren, leaving most of the family members shaking their heads in confusion. Here is where I find myself with my Grandpere Foucault.

**Key question 1: What's the trade off between carrying the past forward and reconfiguring it to envision or generate the new?**

This question is the most political one we've been asked to answer as a panel for two reasons. The first is due to the fact that I have centered much of my work on women teachers' bodies. Critical and post-structural feminists such as Bartky (1988) and the aforementioned Butler (1989) and Sawicki (1991) have debated the usefulness of Foucault's work for theorizing gendered bodies. Some interpretations are that he discusses at best a genderless body and at worst a masculinized body, ignoring women's bodies all together. Others suggest that the suppleness of Foucault's theories lies in keeping the materialities of bodies vague, while carefully outlining the discursive structures involved. Therefore relying on Foucault's work simultaneously acknowledges discursive history of bodies but may further displace more recent and less acknowledged scholars (i.e., women, feminists, and gender scholars) who more explicitly attend to the particular experiences of female bodies and non-cisgendered subject bodies and their many intersections. And if you are wondering if the growing alphanumeric string of LGBTTIQQ2SAA is necessary, I'd argue that for Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, Transsexual

(and some would add Trans\*), Intersexed, Queer, Questioning, 2 Spirited, Assexual people, and Allies, a few extra letters is the least we can do.

The second reason the question of carrying the past and/or reconfiguring something anew is political for me is the matter of citations. With publishing word limits being a reality for me, the more I cite my Grandpere Foucault, the less I am able to cite the women who are doing work that is just as solid. I am troubled by the thought that the women who were doing the same or similar intellectual work as Foucault, women who may even have been his contemporaries, never have received and may never receive the type or level of accolades Foucault has gotten. Accepting citations as a subversive act within a patriarchal system of higher education and research means I have had to talk out of both sides of my mouth. I have to show I know the key players, yet I also must undermine those people, mostly White, western men, who have dominated theoretical work. I encourage myself (as I am encouraging you) to think who else is doing this work? Remember the root word in seminal is no accident, and the use of literature deemed to be semen-al should be questioned at every pass.

**Key question 2: To what degree would our academic grandparents likely rebel?**

To me, it seems that Foucault's favorite activity was to be obtuse, so the most likely thing he would do is to not rebel at my claiming him in my academic lineage, perhaps because rebelling is what we might expect of him. Of course, I imagine him stating the importance of exercising my freedom, that I am freer than I feel I am (indeed we all are) and that I am free to call him Grandpere; it is part of the post-structural analysis afforded to me to not take my familial family tree nor my conventional academic family tree with my Mama Donna Alvermann as natural. Suspending naturalness and

practicing permanent questioning as an act of freedom was thankfully Foucault's bag (Rajchman, 1985). I also imagine him shaking his head at me, the granddaughter who forced herself on him, the granddaughter who fashions herself a bit of a rebel despite all the ways that she concedes to conventional body standards and the comfort she feels in critical feminist theory. I imagine him saying, "C'mon Christine, you know better." But do I? Did he?

Would he rebel against media theorist Kroker's (2006, March 13) supposition that that we have veered into a primitive post-humanism? Kroker, among others, argue that technologies "accelerating at the speed of light" (Purgar, Kroker & Kroker, n.d., ¶2) drive a virtual truth and have taken parasitical possession of our bodies. If you don't believe Kroker, I challenge you to withstand the feeling of withdrawal when you leave your cell phone at home, the phantom limb itchiness like an appendage has just been lopped from your body. In one way, Kroker is saying that we have not begun to reach the ethics of Foucault (1984/1986) who offered the care of the self, meaning to live life as a work of art and turn away from self-sacrifice. But Kroker is also saying that as a society we doubt that we ever will live life as a work of art because we are positioned by fear, panic, and violent sacrifice to capitalism, war, religion, and other social forces. For this, I believe Foucault (1984/1985) would have words about why have we forgotten the value of pleasure situated in the body. Perhaps embodied pleasure would be a lovely way to rebel against the concept of a cynical ideology. I am not so certain however that my metaphorical grandfather would have words for what that rebelling with pleasure means for my female body.

So it is with this notion I come to the last question:

**Key question 3: If we could engage in conversation with our academic forebears at the end of this panel session, what might we gain collectively?**

To answer this question, I pay homage to my actual familial grandfather, my Pop Pop. Please do not question that I love and miss this man, but among other things, he was sexist. As years pass, I soften my memory of his sexism. The photographs from our family albums sanitize the unsavory aspects of my Pop Pop. I argue the same is true for Foucault, and the Internets have become the family album. We can watch his debates with Noam Chomsky (Chomsky & Foucault, 1971). He has a Facebook page (Michel Foucault, n.d.) and is super-meme friendly (e.g., *Riding the Sociological Roller Coaster*, 2013). But if we could have a conversation with my Grandpere Foucault we would all see he is a man with flaws. He's just a smart dude in a black turtleneck. Sure we could ask him to set the record straight on all the questions we have. I know I would ask him if he intended to leave women's bodies out of the conversation, but I also believe his answer would leave me unsatisfied. Did I mention he liked to be obtuse? Nevertheless, I would take pleasure in asking the question and believe the question would honor the pursuit for freedom that Foucault has inspired in me.

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## **Reaction and Remarks**

### **David Reinking**

I'm a genetic grandparent, and at a stage where I'm becoming an academic grandparent (my doc students are now graduating their own students), although in a much more modest way than the well-known and influential intellects our panelists identify. So, I like the grandparent metaphor. It reminds us that we are products of the intellectual traditions to which we have been exposed and to which we gravitate in our professional and personal lives. I also like the framing questions for this session because they help us to deconstruct and challenge those perspectives, acknowledging that the world evolves, as does our own thinking. We are not just clones of those who have become before us. Grandchildren eventually grow up and have their own grandchildren.

Given the philosophical bent of the panelists' choices, it may also be relevant to juxtapose another metaphor with the grand-parenting theme here. Wittgenstein (1980) asked rhetorically in questioning the notion of progress in philosophy: "Philosophy hasn't made any progress? If somebody scratches the spot where he has an itch, do we have to see some progress?" And, I like Critchely's (2015) riff on that theme in a piece eulogizing his mentor, the philosopher Cioffi:

Philosophy scratches at the various itches we have, not in order that we might find some cure for what ails us, but in order to scratch in the right place and begin to

understand why we engage in such apparently irritating activity. Philosophy is not Neosporin. It is not some healing balm. It is an irritant, which is why Socrates described himself as a gadfly (np).

In reading the panelists talking points I thought of another quote from Wittgenstein (1980): “When you are philosophizing you have to descend into primeval chaos and feel at home there” (p. 65). The grand-parenting theme, as expressed by the panelists, seems to reflect that mixture of chaos and grounding.

### **Donna**

Donna identifies Simone de Beauvoir as her academic grandparent citing Beauvoir’s radical commitment to individual freedom. Knowing Donna well, her affinity to Beauvoir’s stance is no surprise to me. But, she is willing to put that affinity in harms way, noting the paradox of a full commitment to individual freedom that must also acknowledge a necessary coexistence among others who wish to express their own freedom inspired by different values.

Donna’s interest in digital media literacies, which she compares to the rise of mass media in Beauvoir’s day, is a prime example. Digital media extend exponentially our ability to express our individual freedom. But, how can we balance the foundational individual freedoms in a democratic society with achieving an equally foundational commitment to equality and social justice that includes the freedom to reject such goals? The inherent tensions of that paradox are no less than the history of American democracy and the role of literacy in sustaining it. One only has to look at current headlines to see these tensions, from Donald Trump to trigger warnings to big-brother monitoring of social media and to censoring content of the Internet.



I wonder whether de Beauvoir would rebel against Donna's use of "Webcam 101 for seniors," or would she respect Donna's resistance to it.

## **George**

I have to confess a bias for George's academic grandparent, as a descendent of candidates for my own academic grandparents, which include Charles Pierce, William James, and John Dewy. Richard Rorty would no doubt have identified these pillars within a pragmatic tradition as his own grandparents.

In his explanation of Rorty's influence on his perspectives, George cites what he calls the well-worn metaphor that "We rebuild the boat [of language] as we sail it. But, we are perpetually at sea." We never reach the shore. I'm also reminded of a complementary land-based metaphor: "Our knowledge is an island in a sea of ignorance. As our island of knowledge grows, so does the shoreline of our ignorance."

George's affinity for Rorty might be considered a counterpoint to de Beauvoir's commitment to individual freedom by acknowledging that we are never completely free from conventional, often unspoken or unanalyzed, assumptions. For example, Alfred North Whitehead advised historians who wanted to understand an era to consider what they did *not* write about. Our individuality can be expressed only within certain collective bounds.

Yet, perhaps paradoxically, shared assumptions don't obviate sharp disagreements among those who have different priorities within those bounds. Nonetheless, theoretically at least, within a democratic tradition there is a greater commitment to open dialog and compromise. Our failure to realize that other cultures lack that commitment likely

explains in large measure our ineffective strategies in dealing with the Mideast and radical Islam.

For example, in relation to schooling, I think of Egan's thesis in *The Educated Mind* (1997). He argues that American schools have three incompatible goals: socialization, encouragement of conformity, and development of individual expression and potential. Advancing one undermines the other two, much as prisons have the mutually exclusive goals of punishment and rehabilitation. It is, he says, as if Plato and Rousseau tried to open a school.

Metaphors are relevant here too. Lakoff (1995) has argued that the difference between American conservatives and liberals is in essence the perception of government as a disciplinary father or as a nurturing mother. Also relevant is Labaree's (2010) thesis that American education today is about credentialing and as a way to insure that upper-class parents can be assured that they will stay one step ahead of the aspirations of the lower classes.

As George says (and I wholeheartedly agree) "the assumptions we bring to bear in addressing our technical questions must pay their own freight, that is, they are justified only in so far as they get us the results we seek, what James (1907) figuratively termed their cash-value." But Rorty also argues that education must go beyond technical competence. We must know the purpose of education as a societal endeavor as a starting point for all that we do in teaching, but also in research. For me, following Karl Hostetler (2005), it is improving people's wellbeing. George also says, "We have to listen!" coming into direct contact with those with whom we disagree. In that sense, we need to more

firmly embrace democracy's commitment to finding common ground and to reaching acceptable compromise.

## **Mona**

Mona identifies Vygotsky as her academic grandfather. She certainly isn't alone. He is arguably the most influential theorist of language influencing our field. Not only did he open our collective eyes to the role of social factors as fundamental to literacy, but his ideas have clearly permeated the research-practice barrier.

In regards to the first question posed in this session, she argues that there is no tradeoff between carrying the past forward and reconfiguring it toward the new. I agree. If any academic grandparent can remain perennially current in the world of literacy, perhaps it is Vygotsky. It is difficult to imagine a future in which his fundamental observations about literate activity within social contexts is negated. Further, Mona observes that his views find equally friendly ground in Piaget's constructivist's orientation and in the distinctly different cognitive work of Palinscar and Brown (1994).

Yet, Mona positions Vygotsky more as a springboard to the work of other theorists who provide compatible, but deeper, understandings of human growth and development, specifically related to language and literacy. In terms of what Vygotsky might rebel against, she cites examples of the not uncommon phenomenon that justifies the lament of some leading intellectuals that they might be protected from their disciples. Perspectives can be and are misappropriated and misinterpreted to bolster positions and actions that would make our grandfathers role over in their proverbial graves.

I might add an example from Peter Johnston's talk at the conference on Thursday. He referenced "scaffolding" as a "cold metaphor" because it doesn't capture the nuances

of students' engagement with literature under the circumstances he outlined. According to many of my colleagues much more knowledgeable about Vygotsky than I am, there has been much distortion of Vygotsky's ideas, most often by those who have not read the translations of his original work.

### **Christine**

Interestingly, like Donna, Christine also invokes Michele Foucault, another French intellectual as an academic grandparent. Why is it that European intellectuals are so attractive to many in our field (one could add Sarte, Bakhtin, Derrida, Habermas)? I can recall only one instance of an attempt to connect literacy themes to eastern philosophy—Gaskins (1998).

But unlike the other panelists, for Christine, Foucault as a grandparent serves more as a *bête noir* inspiring in her, if I understand correctly, a stance of approach-avoidance. Our intellectual grandparents can be irritants as well as inspirational thinkers. So, her relationship to her grandparent is much in the vein of the quotes about philosophy from my introduction. It seems that she and others like her who are interested in feminism, sexuality, and her case the gendered bodies of teachers, are attracted to Foucault's ideas about power, while being distressed with his implicit or explicit patriarchal orientation.

My favorite quote from her written talking points is: "To me, it seems that Foucault's favorite activity was to be obtuse." An unanswered question I have is whether the language of philosophy must be obtuse. Can profound ideas be expressed simply and powerfully or must they inherently push against the expressive limits of language. It seems an important question for educators and even more important to those of us interested in literacy.

The same might be asked of our field. Are we too obtuse in our scholarly work removing it too far from the pragmatic day-to-day challenges of advancing literacy in schools and classrooms? Are those challenges too prosaic to meet our intellectual needs? Do the intellectual stances identified in this collection of grandparents do real work in classrooms and/or the policy arena? If so, how? In this collection of academic grandparents we have hints, but not answers. I think we need to look more toward explicit answers. Otherwise, we risk only scratching some intellectual itch amounting to no more than “philosophication.”

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**Advancing Literacy: Mentoring Authors of Informational Text**

**Joyce C. Fine**

**Helen Robbins**

**Florida International University**

For the 2015 American Reading Forum Conference, there was a new type of proposal called Advancing Literacy which was offered as an option for presenters. This option allowed educators to submit a paper presentation that was an on-going study, a work in the planning stages, or a theoretical work. The paper was to be presented in ten minutes followed by ten minutes for discussion of key questions that could potentially advance the literacy project. This new option was an appropriate variation to the more typical conference presentation because the members of the American Reading Forum have mentoring of literacy educators as a main goal. Often, the small group discussions following presentations produced suggestions for future directions for presenters' research. With this new format, the opportunity was formalized. It also gave the authors the chance to bring a problem to solve to the organization. This paper explains what was presented in the new format, what question was asked, the suggestions that were brainstormed, and the ways the key question was addressed following the conference.

Our presentation described a supervised, clinical practicum called the Community Literacy Club (CLC) which was actually the integration of two courses in the Master of Science in Reading Education program, Diagnosis of Reading Problems and Remediation of Reading Difficulties. Each program candidate, a certified teacher, assesses and intervenes using the data from assessments for 2 ½ weeks, for 2 hours per day, Monday through Friday, from 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. in the summer at a school site. The teachers tutor one-on-one to assess and intervene with elementary-age English learners struggling with reading acquisition. During the first week, the candidates use the first hour to assess the students using informal instruments. The second hour they conduct diagnostic teaching using lessons on aspects of reading that have been identified as most likely needing instruction. From the second week until the middle of the third week, candidates create lessons to intervene with targeted instruction tailored to the students'

needs during the first hour. During the second hour, a strategy called *Mentoring Authors* was used in which the candidates and their students each create an information book on a topic of common interest.

During the Mentoring Authors sessions, candidates used a modification of the Think-aloud Color coding strategy (Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, & Watts Taffe, 2013). This strategy uses colors to mark different text structures used in informational texts. The creators of the strategy suggest that as the teacher reads the text, students put a color-coded note or tab in their text according to the color codes they have been given. For instance, an example of a comparison is tabbed with a green note, a definition is tabbed with a blue note. Instead of this type of demonstration, we asked the candidates to teach informational text structure explicitly. They then gathered information from books and online (Appendix A). The candidates printed copies of information found on the internet or copied pages in books so students could physically underline the information using colored markers or crayons (Appendix B). Then, when the students were including the information in their books, they again underlined the information in accordance with the color code (Appendix C). Students were learning academic vocabulary on the topics while they were learning to understand and utilize the various text structures.

We wanted to assess if the students were learning about text structure. We did assess the students using a Basic Reading Inventory (BRI) (Johns, 2012) at the beginning and end of the CLC. However, there was so much other instruction occurring that it would have been inappropriate to use the results of the pretest/posttest of the BRI to assess the impact of using the color coding. Because the teacher candidates had assessed the students and had developed targeted, data-driven instruction based on their analysis, one could not attribute the change in the students' overall growth to the Mentoring Authors experience which was just one part of the

instruction. We decided to bring the problem to the ARF Advancing Literacy session. Our question was: *How should this strategy be assessed? Should it just be left as a strategy and not try to assess the effect on students' reading comprehension?*

The audience was appreciative of the situation. They agreed that the pretest/posttest using the BRI from the beginning and the end of the CLC was not appropriate. They suggested that we create an informal assessment of the information that was being taught during the Mentoring Authors experience. This suggestion was well-received with the realization that what was being taught was Information Literacy and specifics related to text structure.

Upon closer reflection, we realized that we could assess the effect of teaching this type of information literacy. We were familiar with an instrument to assess knowledge of information literacy that is online and freely available with versions for different grades. It is the Tools for Real-time Assessment of Information Literacy (TRAILS), developed by the Kent State University Libraries. However, the questions in TRAILS seem to be designed for students who are English proficient. The language structures in the statements are complex and vary from question to question. We wanted to be able to use an assessment with English learners or emerging bilinguals, as Helman calls elementary students who are working on second-language literacy development (2016). These students also need to learn about text structure. They comprehend best when there are language structures that have been taught and practiced (Dutro, Mendia Nuñez, & Helman, 2016). For this reason, there was a need to create an assessment that was designed with a repeated pattern structure in the questions (Appendix D).

We also realized that the type of reading and writing was much like many of the standards of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS)(2010) or the Language Arts Florida Standards (LAFS), which are a modified set of standards that the Florida Department of

Education created based on the CCSS. For instance, LAFS 1W 3.8 (LAFS for grade 1, writing or researching to build and present knowledge) states that “students need to be able to gather information from provided sources to answer a question.” One of the first questions on the KILTS assessment asks students to identify the resource they would use if they want to research facts about seals. The stem and choices state: “If I want to find facts about seals, I would look for a) A description and picture in an encyclopedia, b) A story about *Sammy the Seal* or c) A drawing of circus animals.” This requires the student to know the type of categorical information that is found in an encyclopedia, a trade book, or a picture book. According to Afflerbach and Cho (2009) such knowledge is a constructively responsive comprehension strategy, critical cognitive knowledge for students when reading. On a higher level, LAFS 3 RI 3.9 states that students should be able to compare and contrast the most important points and key ideas presented in two texts on the same topic. The ability to do this, (Afflerbach & Cho, 2009) is a strategy needed for reading across multiple texts. In the Mentoring Authors experience, students learn these strategies, to create their books using the information gained. Many of the goals of the standards for students are congruent with the goals for the Mentoring Authors experience.

To align the assessment with the Language Arts standards, which express what students are supposed to be able to do, but not how to teach them, the first author decided to use the multiple choice format for questions, similar to the (TRAILS) assessment. The *Knowledge of Information Literacy and Text Structure (KILTS)*, a twenty-question, multiple choice informal assessment was designed to be used as pretest and posttest assessments with the Mentoring Literacy Experience as the treatment. The KILTS assessment was piloted in the summer. It was from that pilot that the need to simplify the vocabulary became apparent. For instance, students

did not know the meaning of the specific term “quarter” as in the quarter of a football game. They were familiar with the word “innings” from baseball so the item was changed to reflect the more familiar sports terminology. In order to advance literacy, as the ARF session was designed to do, we developed a full research study which will be implemented in fall 2016, at a charter school with approximately 100 third grade English learners and a similar comparison group at another charter school. We intend to share the results at the 2016 conference.

Thinking back to the purpose of the Advancing Literacy session, it seems the intention of the conference planners has certainly been met. During the Advancing Literacy session, as the conference attendees sat in a circle, they listened carefully to our situation, heard our concerns, and made suggestions to focus on the specific types of knowledge needed to scaffold students to navigate their way through reading and writing informational texts. The attendees suggested designing an instrument to assess the specific knowledge about information literacy and text structure which teachers in our program were teaching as they created information books. The suggestion spurred our thinking and sparked the creative energy to produce an instrument appropriate for emergent bilinguals in our diverse school district. The discussion and input helped solve the dilemma of how to assess the impact of the Mentoring Authors experience without confounding it with the targeted literacy-learning instruction based on the assessment of individual students.

The conference planners deserve much credit for instituting this type of innovative, collaborative session which has had a very positive effect, helping to give insight into how to get research-based evidence to support an innovative teaching practice. This article was written to thank them and to share with the ARF membership and those reading the yearbook the benefits of the collaborative input of our colleagues!

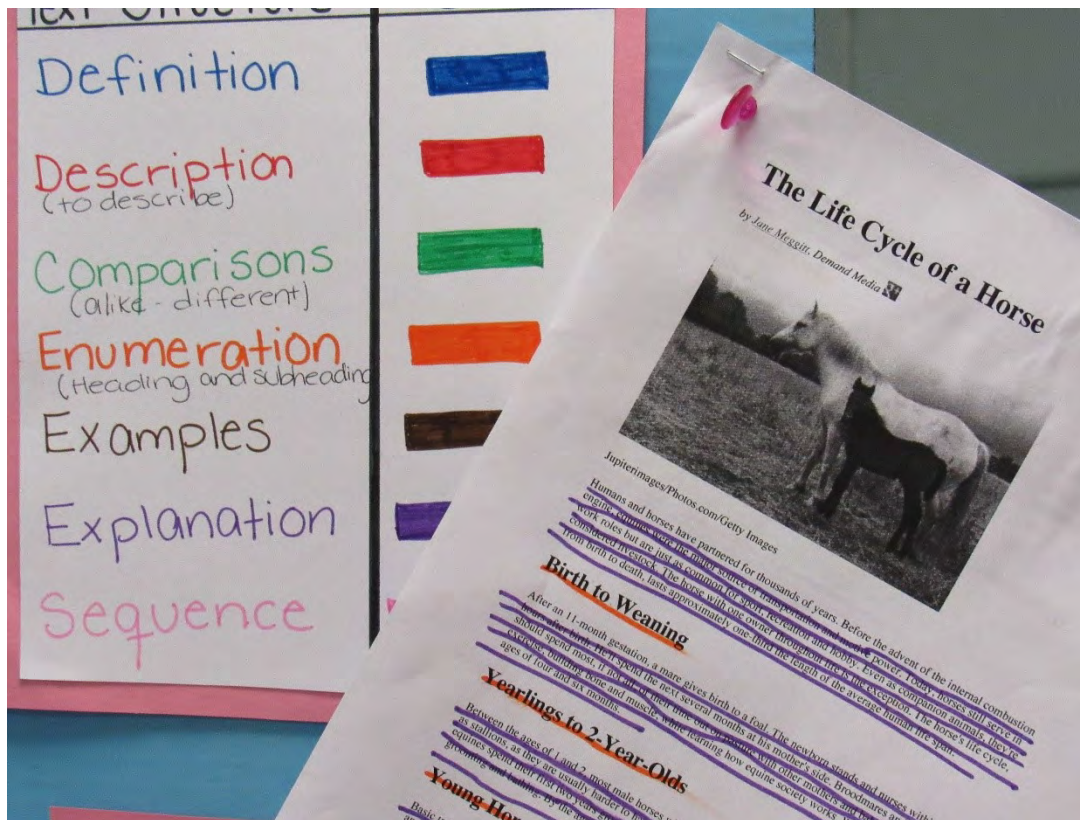
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## Appendix A





Color codes were posted on the student niche, a science board with student work, along with marked text found online.

# Elephants Never Forget

Elephants are big—really big. They are the largest land animals in the world. They are also clever and sensitive. Elephants have good memories—they can remember their relatives for a long time. They care for their families and appear to show sadness when loved ones die. These animals are strong and gentle. They are also in danger. Today, many herds of wild elephants are fighting to survive.

Many thousands of years ago, large elephant-like mammals called American mastodons and woolly mammoths roamed the earth. These ancient relatives of today's elephants are now extinct.

Today, there are two main groups of elephants—African and Asian. They are easy to tell apart if you know what to look for. Scientists have also discovered that African elephants may include two different species—forest elephants and savannah elephants. Savannah elephants are larger than forest elephants. Their ears are bigger and their tusks are more curved.

All elephants are herbivores. They eat grasses, bark, twigs, leaves, and fruit. They can spend 18 hours each day eating. An adult elephant might eat more than 400 pounds of food in one day. They also drink about 30–50 gallons of water each day. They travel long distances to find it.





**Elephants in Africa**  
8–10 feet tall at shoulder  
Tusks weigh up to 11,000 pounds

**Elephants in Asia**  
6–8 feet tall at shoulder  
Tusks weigh up to 6,000 pounds

**manatee**

Picture of student's marked page printed from the internet identifying the type of information he had found.

## Appendix C

A hand-drawn comparison chart on a spiral notebook page. The chart is divided into two columns by a vertical green line. The left column is titled 'Dolphins' and the right column is titled 'Fish'. Both titles are written in green marker. The chart compares various characteristics of dolphins and fish using bullet points. At the bottom of the page, there are small, colorful drawings of a dolphin and two fish.

Dolphins	Fish
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Dolphins have a blow-hole.</li><li>• They feed their babies with milk.</li><li>• On their chin they have a tiny hair.</li><li>• The Dolphin gives a live birth.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• They have gills.</li><li>• They make their tails move side to side.</li><li>• The fish is a cold blooded animal.</li><li>• The fish lay eggs.</li></ul>

This is an example of a comparison chart that was included in a student-created book.

## Appendix D

*Knowledge of Information Literacy and Text Structure (KILTS)*

1. If I want to find facts about seals, I would look for
  - a. A description and a picture in an encyclopedia.
  - b. A story about Sammy the Seal.
  - c. A drawing of circus animals.

LAFS 1.W.38

2. If I want to find facts about trees, I would
  - a. Look at a show on TV about trees and forests.
  - b. Watch a video on YouTube about tall plants.
  - c. Go to [www.realtrees4kids.org](http://www.realtrees4kids.org) to find facts.
3. If I want to compare the weather in New York with the weather in Florida, I would
  - a. Read a newspaper to find out what the temperature is today in Florida.
  - b. Find out how many people are at the beach in New York and in Florida on a hot day.
  - c. Find out how much rain there is in a year in both places on a map.
4. If I want to learn how to make a cake, I would
  - a. Read an article about the amount of sugar and flour in birthday cakes.
  - b. Read a book on how to make a cake and follow the steps.
  - c. Watch a video of people eating cake at a birthday party on Google.

LAFS W 2.5 : LAFS W 3.7

5. If I want to find information about lions, I would
  - a. Look in the table of contents of a book on wild animals.
  - b. Page through a nature magazine for pictures of lions.
  - c. Read a story called Andy and the Lion.
6. If I want to find out about the kind of flowers that bloom in spring, I would
  - a. Go to Home Depot and buy spring seeds to plant.
  - b. Read an article in "Better Homes and Gardens" on plants that bloom in spring.
  - c. Buy a calendar with pictures of flowers.
7. If I did not know the meaning of a word in my science book, I would
  - a. Ask my friend what it means.
  - b. Ask the teacher to read the word and tell me the meaning.
  - c. Look in the glossary in the back of the book.



8. If I want to learn facts about stars in the sky, I would
  - a. Observe them at night and find the North Star and Milky Way.
  - b. Read details about the patterns of stars in the sky on the internet.
  - c. Read a magazine at the grocery store about stars in the movies.
9. If I want to compare how well two basketball teams played each quarter,
  - a. I would find out the score for each team at the end of the game.
  - b. I would read a newspaper to find the score for each after each quarter.
  - c. I would read an article to find out about members of the team.
10. If I want to get a definition of type of dinosaur,
  - a. I might get it by reading the words after the name of the dinosaur in an information book.
  - b. I might get it by checking a glossary in the back of the book.
  - c. Both of the above.
11. If I want to find out about kinds of birds, I would
  - a. Read a book on building a bird house.
  - b. Read an encyclopedia article on types of birds.
  - c. Find a picture of different birds on the Internet.
12. If I want to learn more about how people live in different places, I would
  - a. Look in a book about people around the world under the headings of food, dress, and work.
  - b. Read today's newspaper to see what happened in different countries.
  - c. I would look at the pictures on the internet of people around the world.
13. If I want to find out what a part of an information book is about, I could
  - a. Read the summary at the end of the book.
  - b. Read the questions and answers at the end of the book.
  - c. Look at the Table of Contents and read the topics and subheadings.
14. If I want to write a comparison of two animals, I would need to
  - a. Read about the animals' size, color, habitat, and eating habits.
  - b. Read a story about where the animals live.
  - c. See a video about the animals in the wild.
15. If I want to create an information book about foods from around the world, I would
  - a. Get books from the library about food and how to prepare the different types.
  - b. Read articles on the internet about food from different countries, plan an introduction, select countries, and select vocabulary for the glossary.

- c. Get books about foods from different countries, select characters to include in different settings, and write about how they prepare their food.

16. If I want to know how the 13 American colonies became states, I would

- a. Read books on American History and the Revolution in the library.
- b. Study the Declaration of Independence at the museum.
- c. Read biographies of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.

17. To write a book about different kinds of dogs, I would

- a. Find facts on dogs on the internet and in books, and organize the facts, definitions, and details before writing.
- b. Find facts about a dog on the internet and start writing.
- c. Start writing about the kinds of dogs I like.

18. When I read about animals that I want to write about, I

- a. Draw pictures of each animal and color them before I write.
- b. Take notes about the animals and the books where I found the information.
- c. Copy the information carefully, word for word, as it is written in the book.

LAFS 3 W.8

19. When I want to write my opinion that everyone should read every day,

- a. I give a good reason to support my opinion.
- b. I state my opinion why it is the best activity and describe what I read every night before bed.
- c. I state my opinion, give several reasons to support my opinion, and write a conclusion.

20. If I want to compare and contrast living in the city with living in the country, I need to

- a. Interview someone who lives in the city and someone who lives in the country.
- b. Find out important points and key details about life in both the city and the country.
- c. Read stories about living in the city and living in the country.

LAFS 3.3R.I 3.9

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**Engaging Adolescent Latinas through Literature**

**Marie Tejero Hughes, Jessica Hovland, Maria De La Luz Soria, and Eryn Van Acker**

**University of Illinois at Chicago**

## **Abstract**

It is important to engage Latina adolescents in literature that reflects their culture and life, as well as to provide them with an outlet to have conversations about their own identity and perceptions. Amoxtli, an afterschool literacy community, was designed to allow Latinas this opportunity and to give them a space to articulate and affirm their identities within the context of personal goals and cultural expectations. Over the course of three months, 10 Latinas participated in the program that was designed as an inclusive space for reading and discussing literature that reflected their cultural heritage. Through participation in the program, the goal was to learn more about the girls': 1) connections with characters in the readings and other Latinas, 2) views of self-identity within their culture, 3) use of reading strategies and 4) perceptions of the program. Interviews, journals, artifacts, and written narratives created by the adolescents were collected throughout the program to document their perceptions and experiences. The Latina adolescents reported positive experiences with both reading culturally-relevant novels and engaging in the activities.



## **Engaging Adolescent Latinas through Literature**

Reading opens the mind to new ideas, places, and experiences. Through literature, adolescent readers may find confirmation of their personal beliefs and experiences or encounter challenges to their own view of the world (Park, 2012). By reading critically, making personal connections to texts, and discussing topics raised by literature, adolescents may not only gain knowledge, but also explore issues relevant to their lives (Garcia & Gaddas, 2012; Park, 2012). For adolescents, reading literature can provide opportunities for developing self-awareness and cultural identity (Landt, 2006; Howard, 2011). By making connections between themselves and the stories they read, adolescents may find affirmation in their own experiences and cultural heritage (Landt, 2006).

The benefits of recreational reading are well documented and correlate both with higher academic achievement as well as positive social engagement (Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, & Morris, 2008; Howard, 2011). Given that traditional school classrooms often provide limited to no opportunities for reading and discussion of literature relevant to underrepresented populations, out of school spaces can provide environments conducive to adolescent exploration of identity, culture, and social issues (Garcia & Gaddes, 2012; Polleck & Epstein, 2015). Creating safe spaces to interact with and discuss culturally relevant literature is especially critical for adolescents of Latino descent, given that Latino youth experience higher rates of high school dropout and lower reading comprehension skills than their same age peers of other ethnicities (Garcia & Gaddes, 2012; Lesaux, Crosson, Keiffer, & Pierce, 2010). Moreover, many Latinos appear to place less importance on reading than their urban peers of other racial identities, thus engaging less with literature (Barry, 2013). This is especially concerning for Latino students with special needs, given that reading difficulties are more prevalent in this population (Wei,

Blackorby, & Shiller, 2011). Therefore, it is important to provide safe spaces for adolescent Latinos to see themselves in literature and critically analyze what it means to be Latino within and outside their community. It is through these spaces, that they can have conversations which allow them to explore their identities, assert their voices, and analyze the readings and issues from their own perspectives (Wissman, 2011).

Although the importance of integrating multicultural literature into the school curriculum has been emphasized for years (Brooks, 2006), a comprehensive exposure to this literature continues to not occur within schools (Tatum, 2006). Thus, providing opportunities for students to engage in literature that reflects their culture and life is the basis of culturally relevant pedagogy, which can foster students' academic success and develop or maintain their cultural awareness (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In building academic success, interaction with culturally relevant texts is shown to increase the reading engagement among Latinos (Godina, 2003) and African Americans (Piazza & Duncan, 2012). Additionally, culturally relevant texts support comprehension as students are able to apply background knowledge to the material in the text (Jimenez & Gamez, 1996; Freeman & Freeman, 2004). As an example, Godina (2003) incorporated Mesoamerican ancestry in the instruction of content and found that Latino students not only learned more about their culture, but that it promoted positive perception about their participation in class. While research in the school environment supports utilizing culturally relevant text to increase engagement and participation, literature involving out of school literacy communities (e.g., book clubs) reveals how literary practices involving these texts can assist adolescents from underrepresented groups in understanding their identity and navigating issues in their social worlds (Polleck & Epstein, 2015).

Due to the pressures of standardized, high-stakes testing and inadequate teacher preparation related to issues of race and gender in the classroom, out-of-school literacy communities can provide a space for adolescents to share about what it means to be an adolescent of a certain ethnicity, class and gender, as well as the demands and expectations surrounding those labels (DeBlase, 2003). Framed primarily as a social activity, recreational literacy communities create a place for sharing and negotiating understandings of literature, identity, and the world, which can result in a transformative experience (Polleck, 2010). In fact, participating in these types of experiences can increase students' enjoyment of reading and engagement with texts. Polleck (2010) noted, in a study specifically focused on urban, female, adolescents, the powerful influences of participating in a book club and how it impacted adolescents' self-concept, self-esteem, friendship with other girls, and emotional development. As an illustration, in discussions of a text in which a character struggled with body image, girls in the study supported each other with difficulties related to body weight and low self-esteem; they ended the book feeling "more confident," "more open-minded," and "respected" (Polleck, 2010, p. 60). Likewise, girls reported that by making connections with characters in the books and talking about them, they were able to work through personal conflicts in their own lives.

Similarly, Park (2012) conducted a study of the responses of urban middle school girls to literature in an after school reading community. In this study, the researcher discovered that members of the group developed a sense of comradery by talking about literature together and felt a sense of trust within the reading community. Thus, these literacy communities become vehicles that allow adolescents to interact with literature through social engagement and within the context of community. The social interactions in the programs involved recognizing both the

shared heritage of the adolescents as well as the personal thoughts and experiences each brings into discussions (Arzubiaga, Artiles, King, & Harris-Murri, 2008).

## **Purpose**

Reading is a cultural practice and the interactions between readers and text can differ depending on context (DeBlase, 2003). Where traditional classrooms often place the adolescent reader in a passive role and typically exclude diverse voices, the literacy communities can encourage questioning and discussion about gender, culture, family, and identity issues. Through discussions about both literary characters that represented the traditional view of Latina women and characters that challenged traditional, static identity labels, girls are provided opportunities to co-construct their identities and views about culture. By interpreting text through the lens of their own experiences and social interaction with other Latina adolescents, literacy activities can be used as ways to negotiate different/competing “codes of meaning” among families, friends, school, and community (DeBlase, 2003, p. 285).

In this study, reading is viewed as both an individual and a social activity that contributes to social and cognitive development; when individual connections to text are shared with others, it allows for a merging of narratives and deeper understanding of individual lives, families, and communities (Polleck, 2010). Furthermore, although this research focuses on a specific demographic, namely, Latina adolescents, this group identity is viewed as dynamic and culturally constructed. While the girls in this study are mediating two cultures, that of their Mexican parents and the dominant mainstream culture, they are not viewed as passive, but perceived as able to define how they see themselves and their culture, and create their own goals (Artiles, 2009).

*Amoxltli*, which means book in Nahuatl (historically Aztec), was developed by the researchers as an after school literacy community program which included both social and literacy components. The program was developed to provide opportunities for adolescent Latinas, including girls who struggled with reading, which were not available in the community or schools. Amoxltli provided an inclusive space for girls to share and negotiate their understandings of literature, identity, and the world. In this study, we were interested in learning about adolescent Latinas': 1) connections with characters in the readings and other Latinas, 2) view of self-identity within their cultural, 3) use of reading strategies, and 4) perceptions of the program.

## **Methods**

### **Participants and Setting**

The Amoxltli program was located in a predominantly Latino neighborhood (78%) with strong identification with the Mexican culture located in a large, Midwestern city. The neighborhood has historically been a port of entry for immigrants with residents living mostly in modest bungalows and brick two-flats. It is a working-class neighborhood with families predominately from low to middle socioeconomic status with a median household income around \$36,000.

The program was housed at a local elementary school that had a number of community and afterschool programs. Adolescent Latinas were recruited by distributing information to local schools and organizations. The goal was to create an inclusive program open to Latinas of all ability levels, thus special effort was made to encourage Latinas that were identified with a disability or struggled with reading. Thus, special education programs were specifically targeted as well. A total of 11 adolescent Latinas (ages 12-17) signed up for the Amoxltli program and 10

consented to participate in the research study. All of the girls lived in the neighborhood where the program took place and attended one of three local schools. Table 1 presents a summary of the demographics of the participants in this investigation. To protect the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms are used.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

Name	Grade	Age	Ethnic Identity (Self-Reported)	Languages	Country born	Years living in U.S.	Struggling Reader
Marisol	8 <sup>th</sup>	13	Mexican	Spanish, English	U.S.	13	Yes
Patricia	8 <sup>th</sup>	13	Mexican	Spanish, English	U.S.	13	Yes
Violeta	8 <sup>th</sup>	13	Mexican	Spanish, English	U.S.	13	Yes
Yvette	8 <sup>th</sup>	13	Mexican	Spanish, English	U.S.	13	No
Daniela	8 <sup>th</sup>	14	Mexican	Spanish, English	Mexico	7	No
Veronica	8 <sup>th</sup>	14	Mexican	Spanish, English	Mexico	8	Yes
Paula	9 <sup>th</sup>	14	Latina	Spanish, English	Mexico	13	Yes
Erica	9 <sup>th</sup>	15	Mexican	English	U.S.	15	No
Yolanda	9 <sup>th</sup>	15	Latina	Spanish, English	U.S.	13	No
Julia	11 <sup>th</sup>	16	Latina	Spanish, English	U.S.	16	No

## **Amoxltli Program**

The Amoxltli program consisted primarily of a literacy community that focused on reading texts with Mexican-American heroines, but also incorporated speakers and exploration activities in the community. The program took place over the course of one semester (three months) with Latinas meeting after school once a week for about 90 minutes for a total of 10 sessions. Funding for the program was provided through a community engagement grant designed to provide support for small projects in local communities. Each session was led by project leaders, who were all current or former teachers. During program registration, the girls were provided with an overview of different books and were asked to select which they were interested in reading. The girls were then divided into three small groups and read either *Tequila Worm* (2007) by Viola Canales or *Dancing Home* (2011) by Alma Flor Ada and Gabriel M. Zubizarreta. A third book was also used, *The Smell of Old Lady Perfume* (2008) by Claudia Guadalupe Martinez, however most of the girls had already been exposed to it in school; thus it was not a primary focus. The book was used at times to demonstrate the strategies or facilitate discussions, given that the girls were able to make connections between this book and the current book they were reading.

During each session, both whole and small group activities were incorporated. The same project leader worked with the same small group of girls throughout the program. The sessions were divided into four parts: check-in, small group time, large group discussion, and journaling. In small group, girls would read parts of the novel, using reciprocal teaching strategies to support comprehension and engage in discussion. Since a variety of comprehension strategies can be beneficial for students, particularly those struggling with reading (Berkeley, Scruggs, &

Mastropieri, 2010), a number of reading strategies were utilized including predicting, questioning, summarizing and clarifying difficult language and vocabulary words. The explicit use of these strategies by the project leaders in the sessions provided the participants with a great deal of practice along with guidance and were designed to help them process information and enhance learning (Beckman, 2002).) From the very first session, reciprocal teaching was introduced to the participants by the group leaders and the strategies introduced were reviewed at the start of each session. Girls used anchor charts and notes from previous sessions to remind them of the strategy and continue a flow to discussion from week to week.

Additionally, prior to each session, project leaders met to review and discuss the readings and identify themes or issues that were present across the different novels. As part of these discussions, questions were created that spanned the themes across the novels the participants read to help foster discussions. Given that each of the leaders were also teachers, they were prepared in formulating questions that not only addressed comprehension but also would provoke discussions about identity and culture, which were themes that guided the creation of the project. Examples of questions that were asked included: 1. What parts of the main characters life experiences are similar to your own life?; 2. Have you ever fought with a relative or friend? What did you do? If the fight is over, how did it end? Would you do things differently in the future?; and 3. Choose a character from the book. What do you think of the character? What do you like? What do you not like about the character? How do you think people view you? Explain.

A goal was that within each of the small groups, participants had an opportunity to discuss these themes or issues as related to their readings (e.g., self-identity; conflict between expectations at home and society at large) and then later expand the discussions in large group as



they connected it to the other readings and their own experiences. Furthermore, the adolescents were asked to share about events, themes and personal connections they made with their books to help the group gain a better understanding of the texts each small group read. Large group discussion time was designed so that the girls could share out ideas, themes or questions they had with the girls in the other groups. Lastly, at the end of each session the girls would write journal responses to questions posed by the project leaders. These questions built on the discussion questions and themes pulled from the books that allowed the participants to think about their own personal and cultural identities and experiences in relation to the novels.

Guest speakers, who were Latinas, were invited to speak during two of the sessions and discussed their own experiences as a Latina. One discussed the challenges she faced with the language when she was emigrating to the United States (U.S.) and entering higher education. The other guest speaker spoke of her pride of being a Latina and her love of Latino literature and how it helped form her self-identity. A third guest speaker, who was the mother of one of the girls, spoke at the culminating celebration. She discussed her experience of being a mother of a young Latina adolescent and her search for programs that would help her daughter grow into a strong young woman who is proud of her Mexican culture.

Throughout the last few sessions, the girls completed a narrative or poem and created an artifact that defined who they were. Example narratives and short stories were presented to the group from an anthology written by Latina adolescents. These stories served as a means to provide examples of expressing personal and cultural identity and build discussions about participants' own self-identity. The last two sessions were used to give the girls time and support to create the final artifact and written narrative.

Finally, the girls had the option to participate in three additional community experience activities: attending a student art show, seeing a youth theater production, and exploring the city. The art show was attended before the program began as a way for the girls to meet one another as well as experience art culture in their own community. It was produced by a local art program for Latino youth and adolescents within their neighborhood and included masks, paintings, short films, sculpture and interactive art. The youth theater production was written, produced and acted by youth across the city. The play was about the lived experiences of the adolescents and presented short skits about navigating relationships with parents and peers, working toward academic success in school, and dealing with difficult/traumatic life experiences. Lastly, the city outing explored the downtown area of the city the Amoxtli participants lived in by visiting multiple historical sites. This trip was also utilized to take photographs within their neighborhood and of the city to use in their culminating artifacts. Although these outings were optional, all the girls attended the play and only a couple did not attend the art show or community exploration events due to conflicting engagements.

At the conclusion of the semester, the program hosted a celebration where the girls were able to share their written narratives and artifacts with family and friends. This was a festive occasion that brought in many relatives of each of the girls to acknowledge their commitment and growth in the program. It also provided the project leaders an opportunity to showcase the experiences the girls engaged in and to thank the families for the support they provided.

## **Data Sources**

**Interviews.** All the girls were interviewed individually before enrolling in the program and again once the program ended. Interviews were designed to learn more about the Latinas' reading interests and habits, as well as to learn more about their thoughts regarding issues of

identity and culture. The pre-interview contained 10 open-ended questions, lasting roughly 20 minutes (see appendix A for protocol). The initial interview included items on reading interests and habits (e.g., What types of books do you like to read?, How do you know you understand what you are reading?) and personal/cultural identity and experiences (e.g., Tell me about a Latina you admire, Once you finish school what do you want to do?, What do you think your family expects you to do after high school?). The post-interviews consisted of 12 open-ended questions and took on average 15 minutes to administer (see appendix B for protocol). This survey included items about reading interests (e.g., Do you enjoy reading books?), connections with the readings (e.g., Did you connect with/relate to any of the characters in the book you read?), cultural/identity experiences (e.g., Has reading this book changed the way you think about yourself/family/school/future?), and overall feelings about the program (e.g., Can you tell me something you enjoyed about the program?). Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed.

**Journals.** At the end of each the first eight sessions the girls were allowed up to 10 minutes in which to respond to questions related to group discussions in their journals. Journal questions presented to the group included questions such as: Some of the characters in our books care about being smart and/or being pretty. Do you care about these things? Is one more important than the other? Why?; [In the book you are reading] what parts of the main character's life experiences are similar to your own life? Give examples!; and Have you ever been in a fight with a relative or friend? What did you do? If the fight is over, how did it end? Would you do things differently in the future? Copies of their journal entries were collected at the end of the program.

**Written Narrative.** During the final sessions, the girls were asked to write a personal narrative about themselves. The girls could choose between either an essay or an "I am..." poem.

Guidelines were provided for both the essay and the poem to help them organize their thoughts. Seven of the girls wrote essays and three produced the “I am...” poem.

**Artifact.** All the girls completed a culminating project of their choice that demonstrated who they are as an individual. A list of possible projects was provided with examples of each product. These included creating a vision board, picture journal, artistic journal or short film. All proposed projects included compiling pictures, words, drawings, and images to represent the girls’ sense of personal and cultural identity. The girls were given the option of choosing one of the provided projects or propose one of their own. Vision boards were the most popular with eight of the girls creating one, while two created picture journals. These artifacts were also shared with their family and friends during the end of the program celebration.

### **Data Analysis**

Data from the interview transcripts, journals, written narrative, and artifact were gathered and coded using qualitative methodology (e.g., Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Coding was used as a means to rearrange data into categories that allow for comparison of the data and creation of summaries (Maxwell, 2005). Codes were used as labels to assign meaning to chunks of information in a study (Miles Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Three flows of analysis were applied for summarizing the data (Miles et al., 2014). The first flow of analysis involved the researchers independently coding and then summarizing the written data. Key themes were identified and the researchers met to discuss their findings. The second flow of analysis included the development of written data summaries on each theme. These data summaries were presented to the research team and findings were negotiated using the group mind process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Rules were revised as needed and all salient phrases and sentences were read to insure they were placed in the appropriate theme (e.g., connections

with characters). The third flow of analysis involved drawing conclusions and verifying findings. Contradictory evidence was examined and firmly established conclusions reported.

## **Results**

Major themes that emerged from the coding of participants' responses were 1) connections made with characters from texts read, 2) participants' expression of self-concept and cultural identity, 3) use of reading strategies, and 4) participants' overall perceptions of the Amoxltli program. Findings within each theme are presented with direct examples from the various types of data collected across participants.

### **Connection with Characters**

All of the participants, prior to starting the program, reported connecting in some way with characters in books they read. The majority of these connections surrounded adolescent culture (i.e. female lead characters engaging in relationships with boyfriends) and their personal identity (i.e. characters displaying similar personality characteristics as the participants). Julia and Yolanda expressed how they related with characters based on their personal response to life experiences. For example, Julia discussed how she connected with a character, but had more difficulty moving past tragic events than the character in the novel.

[I connected with a] girl that got raped. ... She was actually able to...face it...[and] move on over it... But there was something that happened like a long time ago with my little brother... I can't see this person and feel the same way I used to before that happened because, like, I can't totally get over it. So I guess that was the difference that that girl was able to overcome it and I am still, like, struggling with it and stuff like that.

None of the girls initially identified connecting with characters based on their cultural identity. However, Yolanda reported that she experienced living in a similar environment as a

book she read. "...they were talkin' about gangsters, and everything and on my block we have a lot of that."

In the post interview, eight of the girls indicated that they connected differently with the characters in the books they read within the program than they had to other characters in previously read books. They noted, after reading the book, that they had a stronger sense of pride in their culture. This was evident in their interview responses, such as Veronica's, "[What I liked about the book we read was] how we have to be proud of our cultures and have to be yourself and be proud of who we are and where we come from...because it's a book that makes, like, it makes you realize that you have to be proud of your culture." Other girls made connections specifically to the character's Mexican culture. Specifically, they made reference to Mexican traditions, such as Christmas, quinceañeras, and fiestas. Violeta discussed how she connected with the character in the play with her own experiences.

I want to cry sometimes...because, I don't know, the parts [of the play] where the parents argue with their children and stuff. And it reminded me of me and like, I was like, at the moment I was, like, greedy. Like that at sometimes I don't treat them (my parents) the way they deserve. And it's like, I don't know how to appreciate them or stuff like that.

Both Paula and Patricia said they did not make a connection to the characters in the books read, indicating they did not feel a dissonance with their Mexican heritage as some of the characters did. Paula stated that unlike the character in the book, she felt proud of her culture. Although most of the connections revolved around culture, there were girls that made connections with the characters based on age appropriate themes. Daniela and Erica noted a connection with a character based on navigating relationships with boys. Julia spoke about her struggle with deciding if she should move away from her family in the future, particularly for

college: "I connect to the [character] because I think as a parent, like for my mom, it's very hard to know that I'm leaving at one point...and I know that it might be kind of hard because we've always been together, but I think that at one point we have to leave because that's the, like, life."

Besides most of the Latinas making connections to characters in the books, the program appeared to have influenced how they thought about their culture in their own lives.

### **Self-Concept and Cultural Identity**

Prior to the start of the program, the majority of the Latinas described parts of their self-concept and identity in regards to being learners in school and members of an adolescent culture. Violeta's response was typical of the girls' during the pre-interview in that she expressed her identity as a math student and how she wants to improve in the subject despite her difficulties. Only three girls discussed their culture or family as part of their identity before the beginning of the program.

At the end of the program, girls continued to show self-identity in regards to adolescent culture, such as building relationships with friends and boyfriends, interest in beauty and fashion, engaging in sports and hobbies, and personal goals of going to college. However, data suggest that the girls also came away with a realization of not being afraid to show who they are, being proud of their culture, their religion and their families. Veronica noted that the program changed the way she thought about her family by "not being shy to show how you finally are from the creations and the culture." In her narrative, Julia described how much her Mexican culture means to her.

From the songs and all to the food and traditions I am joyfully part of each and every year... 'El acostamiento del Niño Dios,' in which we rock baby Jesus to put asleep on December 24<sup>th</sup>, and traditionally, pick him up/or get him February 2<sup>nd</sup>. Traditions like

these in which I deeply enjoy because I know that it damn well means family reunion, food, and laugh to laugh.

In their culminating projects, all of the girls included images that reflected their cultural heritage, including images of Mexican food, their families, traditional celebrations and holidays as well as religious artifacts.

The girls' deep connection to their culture also emerged when they were asked who they admired. When asked to name a Latina they admired, seven girls referred to a family member. The girls indicated that they admired their mothers or another family member, because of the person's strong sense of family and hard work ethic. "I admire my mom because she's a hard working woman. That sometimes she gives her food to me when we don't have enough food. And she tries to give me the best, and always make sure I have everything I need or want," Violeta expressed. Another reason the adolescents provided for admiring their family members was their relatives' pride in their culture. Daniela expressed, "[I admire] my mom. That even though she like, she lived in Mexico and now she came here... She's still like Mexican... she's not afraid to say that she's Mexican and she doesn't, like, she's not ashamed of herself." This was a noted change from the start of the program when nine of the girls identified people who were not in their family, such as famous figures, singers and actresses. The girls showed interest in exploring their culture to find out more about themselves as a result of this experience.

### **Reading Strategies**

During each of the sessions, project leaders modeled the use of different strategies as they read the text in their small groups. As a result of this exposure, the girls reported increases in their use of reading strategies over the course of the program. Although prior to the start of the program all of the adolescents reported utilizing at least one reading strategy to ensure they



understood what they read, the most common techniques used by nine of the girls included reading carefully, annotating and rereading. As Patricia stated, "... when I'm reading, I go back to reread the chapter or the page that I didn't understand". One adolescent was able to discuss a more comprehensive approach in that she incorporated a number of strategies while reading, such as asking questions, annotating, and researching topics in more depth on the internet.

However, when interviewed after the program about their reading strategies, the girls reported using a larger number of effective strategies including annotating, questioning, and making connections to support their comprehension. Julia noted that, "The strategies that I used were looking for ways to connect, because I think that's very important because if you don't connect to it or probably if you don't even know what you're reading you're probably not going to pay attention to it." Additionally, the girls also noted using a variety of research strategies that assisted them in monitoring their understanding such as using sticky notes, summarizing and visualizing. Paula explained that writing a summary on a post-it note at the end of each chapter helped her remember what happened in the story and reduced the need to reread to gain the information when discussing the book with her peers. In general, the range of strategies used expanded from the start of the program when girls primarily talked about general reading activities such as carefully reading or rereading.

### **Perceptions of Program**

All the girls rated the Amoxтли program positively. Many of the responses revolved around the social component of the program. The program was organized around a social atmosphere, where girls were able to have time to talk with others about the reading and other topics. Some girls noted being able to make friends, sharing "ups and downs" of the week, going to community outings, group discussions and guest speakers as positive aspects of the program.

For example Erica stated, “There were a lot of things I enjoyed. I enjoyed the instructors. I enjoyed the girls, the food. I enjoyed the books...”. Writing was another aspect they liked about the program. They indicated that journaling helped them to think about their lives, culture and issues of self-concept. Also, writing a goal statement helped them to think about the future. Although some girls noted that they did not like that they had to read a book, they chose to remain in the program and participated in the activities. As Julia declared, “I don’t really like to read and I actually found books that I could connect to. And definitely that looking for other books could help me know that I actually am interested in reading.” Many of the girls, whether they had difficulties with reading or not, stated that they enjoyed the reading that was done during the sessions and especially liked when they were read to.

### **Discussion**

The Amoxthli program was developed to provide an inclusive literacy community for adolescent Latinas. Over the course of the program, it became quite apparent that the girls were excited about this opportunity and appreciated being able to talk with other adolescents and adults. Although the books served as a backdrop to many of the discussions, over time these conversations expanded to issues more proximal to them. The girls were able to discuss how, like many of the characters in the books, they wrestled with their identity as a Latina – both within their family structure as well as society at large. Another trend that was noted was their willingness to be more assertive about the importance of their culture, to talk about what that meant to them, and how their background impacted their interpretations of situations or characters they were reading about. As the girls read the books, talked to other Latinas, and explored during the social outings, they appeared to appreciate their own family members more, especially their mothers, and struggles their relatives had to overcome. However, at the same

time, many of the Latinas also talked about wanting to break away from traditional norms (e.g., not moving out of the home until marriage) that their families had and the difficulties of doing that.

These experiences are very much in line with what others have noted when literacy communities are established with similar populations (e.g., Wissman, 2011). The adolescent Latinas faced and had to negotiate a complex set of cultural identity issues as they read the books and discussed them. Therefore, professionals working with adolescents in out of school literacy communities need to keep this in mind as they consider what texts to read and how they structure conversations about the material (DeBlase, 2003). The texts that are used in recreation literacy programs can provide young Latinas with ways to talk about their own cultural identity and set into motion avenues for them to explore further issues brought forward during these interactions (Carter, 2006). It is key that adolescents are able to make strong connections to the literature they read, since it allows them to make authentic connections to characters or situations taking place (Brooks, Brown, & Hampton, 2008). It is through these associations that Latinas can begin to visualize and consider possibilities not only for the characters, but for themselves based on their life experience.

Professionals heading out of school literacy programs should consider the pedagogy they use to facilitate discussions that go beyond text-central or universal themes, and to allow adolescents to incorporate their own perspectives and challenge conventional standards (Sutherland, 2005). These literacy communities provide springboards for Latinas to engage in complicated conversations with their peers not only about the text, but to explore and reflect on situations closer to home from their own perspectives (Twomey, 2007). Literacy communities, such as book clubs and literature circles, provide unique venues to explore ideas, given that

typically there are a small number of participants making it a more intimate experience (Sanacore, 2013). Thus, these recreational literacy communities can be integral to the overall literacy and identity development of Latinas, since they are able to make connections with one another and the book they are reading (Lenters, 2014). Through the social learning that literacy communities can provide, adolescents are able to reassess their beliefs and thinking about their own identity, community, and the world at large and discover other viewpoints (Davis, 2010).

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## Appendix A

### **Amoxтли Pre-Interview Protocol**

1. What types of books do you like to read? What was the last book you read about? Do you enjoy reading at home?
2. In the books you read, are there characters that you connect with or are similar to you? In what ways?
3. Can you tell me about a favorite character you have from a book or story? Why did you like the character?
4. How do you know you understand what you are reading? Are there strategies that you use to help you read?
5. What do you like to write about? What have you written in the past?
6. What do you use to help you with your writing? Do you have strategies that you use?
7. Do you use books, stories or other readings to learn more about yourself or your family? If so, give some example of what you learn?
8. Tell me about a Latina you admire? It could be someone in your family, someone you know in real life, or it could be someone that is famous, that you look up to or admire. What do you think it is about her that you admire?
9. Once you finish school what do you want to do? What do you think you need to do to make that happen? What do you think your family expects you to do after high school?
10. Have you ever written a goal statement for yourself? Are your goals and ideas about what you want similar to what your family expects you to do or are they different? Give examples of how they are the same and/or different.

## Appendix B

### **Amoxltli Post Interview Protocol**

1. Do you enjoy reading books?
2. Did you connect /relate with any of the characters? If so, which ones? Why did you feel connected/or relate to the character?
3. Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why or Why not?
4. Has reading this book changed the way you think?
  - yourself
  - family
  - school
  - future
  - How? and Why?
5. Describe some strategies that you used. Were any of the strategies helpful? Which ones? Why?
6. Tell me about a Latina you admire (can be someone you know personally or someone you know about)? What is it about them that you like?
7. Once you finish school, what do you want to do? What do you think you need to do make that happen?
8. Did writing your goals (goal statement) help you plan for your future? Did it help in other ways?
9. How did you feel about writing in your journal? Did it help in any way? (Clarify your ideas, help your articulate your thoughts.)
10. How did Amoxltli help you think about yourself and your culture?
11. Can you tell me something you enjoyed about the group?
12. Can you tell me something that you did not like about the group?

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**Professional Learning for Elementary School Literacy Coaches: Needs and Perspectives**

**Lenora C. Forsythe**

**University of Central Florida**

## **Abstract**

In elementary schools, literacy coaches serve as a single component to the greater professional learning system for teachers that provides site-based, relevant, and continuous learning opportunities. Current educational reforms and increased demands for more rigorous standards, instruction, and learning make the role of the literacy coach even more critical, yet little is done to support learning and development within the position. This study captured professional learning needs and perspectives from elementary literacy coaches in a central Florida school district. Findings indicated a need for learning opportunities that offer feedback and collaboration, as well as improved coaching skills and literacy content knowledge. These findings called to action the need to transform learning opportunities for elementary literacy coaches to meet research based best practices in professional learning. Insights gained from the field alongside relevant literature assisted in the development of implications and recommendations for improved learning experiences for elementary literacy coaches.

*Keywords:* elementary literacy coaches, professional learning, literacy coaching

## **Introduction**

Today's rapidly changing literacy demands create a need for ongoing teacher support. Current trends focus on teacher effectiveness and the need to shift instructional practices to better prepare students for college and careers (Alliance for Excellent Education [AEE], 2015; Calo, Sturtevant, & Kopfman, 2014; United States Department of Education [USDOE], 2015). The role of the literacy coach has changed drastically with the onset of challenges from new standards, assessments, and technology which alter instructional approaches (Calo, et al., 2014; Walpole & Blamey, 2008). Literacy coaches play a pivotal role in helping teachers adjust their practices to help facilitate student success.

A consideration of the various educational reform shifts draws attention to a gap in knowledge for all educators, which calls to action adjustments in professional development practices. Walpole, McKenna, and Morrill (2011) present layers of professional development to illustrate the way teachers rely on coaches, coaches rely on administrators, and administrators rely on state and district staff for their learning needs. Literacy coaches are relied upon to impact teacher instruction which should, in turn, lead to improved student learning. Therefore, the formats, topics, and methods for literacy coaches' professional learning should be carefully considered. Literacy coaches must be engaged in high quality learning experiences regarding current educational trends and issues in order to maximize their potential to transform teaching and learning in their school and provide teachers with a common language about literacy.

The purpose of this paper is to raise questions about professional learning for elementary literacy coaches. The study specifically examined how professional learning for elementary literacy coaches was conducted in a central Florida school district and how it could have been

changed to reflect the needs of literacy coaches, as identified through their current perspectives.

Questions that helped guide this research were:

- How are elementary literacy coaches at a central Florida school district “coached” to meet the demands of their roles and responsibilities? Who coaches them?
- Which formats, types, and content of professional learning do participating literacy coaches perceive as most beneficial?
- How is professional learning for elementary school coaches in a central Florida school district addressing current literacy trends and issues, including teaching and learning in the context of new educational standards and 21<sup>st</sup> century learning?
- What improvements can be recommended for the professional learning of literacy coaches in a central Florida school district?

Maximizing the potential role of elementary school literacy coaches calls for a close examination of their current professional learning experiences and considerations for enhancement. Results from this study were used to inform professional learning for elementary school literacy coaches in a central Florida school district.

### **Educational Significance**

Our nation’s urgency to globally compete in the realm of education was amplified by the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which added rigor with the promise of better preparing students for college and careers (AEE, 2015; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). The intensity of the new standards created concern about whether or not teacher capacity could adjust to meet these new, ever changing demands. The standards brought upon a need to transform education to

include personalized, deeply engaged learning with a focus on high-level content and complex skills enabled by new tools (e.g. utilizing complex text to teach reading strategies, utilizing technology to support learning). The National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) (2015) recognized the need to build capacity within schools by examining how professional learning practices can impact student achievement. Environments in which educators learn with and from one another have the power to strengthen teaching and learning (NCTE, 2015). Collaborative professional learning for all educators is warranted to enhance the quality of teaching (Darling-Hammond et al., 2010; National Center for Literacy Education [NCLE], 2013).

Instructional practice, particularly in regards to the role of the teacher, receives much attention for meeting current demands in education. According to the USDOE (2015), the quality of the classroom teacher is research proven to be the single, most important, school-based factor for a child's academic success (Corbett & Knight, 2009; USDOE, 2015). Understanding that the quality of the classroom teacher's literacy instruction can improve with the support of and feedback from a literacy coach is essential. Hattie and Timperley (2007) extensively researched the impact of feedback on student learning which ultimately supported the need for feedback to be relevant and task related. Applying the work of Hattie and Timperley (2007) to literacy coaches as they provide feedback to teachers could critically influence teacher learning, and therefore student learning. Regularly identified as a "hot topic" in literacy, further research is warranted on literacy coaching as a professional learning component for preparing, supporting, and retaining teachers (Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2008; Cassidy, Grote-Garcia, & Ortlieb, 2015; IRA, 2010). When the role is effectively used as a school-based change agent, the literacy coach facilitates learning and collaboration that aids in teachers' professional growth (Aguilar, 2013; Blamey, et al., 2008; International reading Association [IRA], 2010).

As a school-based role, elementary literacy coaches are typically isolated from other coaches (Aguilar, 2013). It is common for literacy coaches to seek professional learning experiences, yet opportunities and or structures for maximizing the development of the coach are nearly nonexistent (Aguilar, 2013; Cornett & Knight, 2009). Application of professional learning practices to literacy coaches recognizes the need for collaborative learning structures, as well as ongoing learning opportunities that build coaching skills and literacy knowledge. Literacy coaches, by design are hired to provide ongoing instructional support for teachers to improve student learning; however, they serve as a single component in a broader professional learning system available for teachers (Cornett & Knight, 2009; IRA, 2010; Walpole & McKenna, 2013). The educational significance of this study lies in the topic and also in its related implications to improve teaching and learning practices that impact literacy coaches, teachers, and students.

## **Literature Review**

### **Definition and Importance of Literacy Coaching**

Coaching positions are common within elementary schools. Though the role comes with much ambiguity, coaches generally support teachers' instructional practices, on-site professional learning, management of materials, and other assigned duties. There are various types of coaches, some are broadly labeled as instructional coaches or academic coaches that oversee and support K-5 curriculum. Others may be more content specific, such as literacy coaches, math coaches, or science coaches. According to Cornett & Knight (2009), a coach is defined as anyone who partners with teachers to help them incorporate research based practices that improve the quality of teaching and student learning. Further, a literacy coach is a professional whose specific goal is to support teachers with the instruction of and improvement in literacy



achievement (Cornett & Knight, 2009; IRA, 2010). For the purpose of this study, an invitation for participation was extended to elementary literacy coaches and academic coaches that identify themselves as literacy focused.

Districts often implement coaching initiatives of various designs, with some focusing on the improvement of particular curricular areas or instruction, while others focus on overall teaching practices. All coaching programs, however, are meant to affect teacher knowledge, instruction, and student achievement (Marsh et al., 2008). There is evidence that professional learning, coaching, and mentoring can improve instruction and promote the retention of highly effective teachers (Aguilar, 2013; Blamey, et al., 2008; IRA, 2010; National Reading Technical Assistance Center [NRTAC], 2010). Coaches are considered a valuable resource to teachers because they provide necessary, job embedded, ongoing, professional learning opportunities at the school site (NRTAC, 2010). Guskey (2002) posits that feedback, along with a balance of support and pressure, are needed for teachers in order for sustainable changes to occur in schools. Coaching, by design, fulfills that need. In many cases, the implementation of literacy coaching is considered the most effective way to provide ongoing professional learning for teachers (NRTAC, 2010).

### **Definition and Importance of Professional Learning**

Professional learning, though the terms may be used interchangeably, differs from professional development. Professional learning is the recommended best practice for educator learning, and is meant to convey the need for educators to be self-developing, continuous learners (Easton, 2008). To further clarify the difference, Fraser, Kennedy, Reid, and McKinney (2007) state that professional learning results in specific changes in teachers' knowledge, skills, attitudes, beliefs, or actions, while professional development refers to broad changes that happen

over longer periods of time. Professional learning honors adult theory, or andragogy, which ensures the need for learning experiences to consider participants' previous experiences, relevance of topics, and autonomy (Knowles, 1978). "Student learning depends on every teacher learning all the time" (Fullan, 2007, p. 35), further substantiating the need for coaches and teachers to engage in professional learning. Literacy coaches serve as a single component in a functioning professional learning system by fulfilling the constant need for learning with site-based, ongoing, embedded experiences for teachers (Aguilar, 2013; IRA, 2010).

Professional learning experiences for elementary literacy coaches should operate under the same premise that is recommended by research for teachers; yet, literacy coaches often struggle to find significant, ongoing, embedded learning experiences that enhance their practice (Aguilar, 2013). Engaging literacy coaches in effective professional learning experiences that are high in quality and rigor lends itself to coaches who are better equipped to enhance teacher practice (Aguilar, 2013). The majority of the literature on literacy coaching focuses on the attempt to correlate the role with improved student achievement, or to better define roles and responsibilities of the coach (Blachowicz et al., 2010; Sweeney, 2011). Limited research is available on the professional learning needed to build coaching capacity and aid in school improvement, yet the implications are plentiful. The remainder of this section of the literature review summarizes some of the key implications for expanding professional learning for literacy coaches.

Per the NCLE (2013), the most powerful learning experiences for educators happen during collaboration with colleagues. The concluding recommendations of the NCLE's (2013) report call for embedded collaboration that is funded to consistently take place within the school day (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2010). Literacy coaches require experiences that allow them to

refine their coaching skills, deepen their content knowledge, and engage teachers in professional learning (Aguilar, 2013). To do this, Aguilar (2013) suggests that coaches work together in teams to support one another under the guidance of a master coach. Blachowicz et al. (2010) found success in using a coaching in context model that allowed new literacy coaches professional learning opportunities in authentic classroom settings to build their coaching and literacy knowledge. Furthermore, in district level professional learning planning sessions, coaches benefited from supporting other coaches, which expanded their professional role (Blachowicz et al., 2010).

In an attempt to reduce the research gap regarding the nature of middle school literacy coaching and its effectiveness in changing teacher practice and improving student achievement, the RAND Corporation funded a study in 2006 to explore middle school literacy coaching in Florida (Marsh et al., 2008). While the focus of the study was on middle school, many of the implications provided are applicable in the elementary setting as well. Specifically, the report recommended adjustments in professional learning to improve the effectiveness of literacy coaches by including adult learning theory, reflective practices, and active learning (Marsh et al., 2008). Differentiated coaching support was also warranted for novice and experienced coaches (Marsh et al., 2008). Literacy coaches reported that they preferred collaborative structures for their own professional learning, yet only 65% of coaches reported collaborating with other coaches once or twice per month (Marsh et al., 2008). Some coaches participated in small group interactions with other coaches on their own, but shared that time constraints prevented these sessions from happening at regular intervals (Marsh et al., 2008).

## **Perspectives or Theoretical Framework**

Three lenses will help frame the understanding of the problem: the sociocultural perspective, adult learning theory, and organizational theory. These lenses were drawn from a review of the literature on literacy coaching and professional learning. They were selected to align with the specific goal of capturing current perceptions and needs of elementary literacy coaches in regard to professional learning. Furthermore, they are interrelated, meaning that each lens complements the others.

First, the sociocultural perspective provides a means to explore how social and cultural settings impact professional learning for literacy coaches (Vygotsky, 1978). Continuous professional learning through collaborative structures support teachers in reconstructing their own knowledge, paving the way for transformation of teaching practices (Fraser, Kennedy, Reid, & McKinney, 2007). Upon examination of professional learning internationally, countries with high student achievement and retention rates provide time for collaborative planning, reflective conversations, and support for studying and evaluating teaching strategies (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2010). The NCLE (2013) points out, “When collaboration is the norm, educators reap a host of benefits, including higher levels of trust and the quicker spread of new learning about effective practices.”

Second, understanding that effective professional learning for coaches must attend to the needs of the coaches themselves (Aguilar, 2013). Adult learning theory considers that learners can identify their needs and formats in which they learn best (Knowles, 1978). It is crucial for literacy coaches to have a solid understanding of how adults learn (IRA, 2010; Walpole & McKenna, 2013), as well as for that same understanding to be applied to professional learning for coaches. Adult learning theory recognizes the value in experiences adults bring to learning

opportunities. The varied amounts of background knowledge impact the relevance of professional learning topics for each individual participant (Easton, 2008). In a study by Walpole et al. (2011) that examined a statewide support system for literacy coaches, success in professional learning came from specific demonstration lessons and instructional modeling, rather than relying on the delivery of information (so “showing” rather than “telling”). Attending to the principles of adult learning theory, such as keeping respectful interactions, relevance, and collaboration at the forefront of learning sessions creates a community that is receptive to learning (Calo et al., 2015; Knowles, 2002). Furthermore, adults often communicate their learning needs, take ownership of their learning, and seek feedback to monitor their growth (Knowles, 2002).

Lastly, organizational theory, with specific attention to the structural frame (Bolman & Deal, 2013), defines barriers to the implementation of a collaborative professional learning system for coaches. In a national survey conducted by the NCLE (2013), educators in various roles reported the need for collaboration to strengthen their learning and teaching practices, yet the survey also indicated a lack of structure within schools and districts to support collaborative practices. According to Bolman and Deal (2013), successful organizations incorporate a mix of vertical and lateral methods to help align goals with practice. Current structures within schools and districts operate under more of a “top down” model and do not afford much time or support for literacy coaches to participate in lateral, “bottom across” efforts (Bolman & Deal, 2013; Fraser et al., 2007). Jewett and MacPhee (2012) suggest that schools need to intentionally create spaces and time for collaboration and propose the use of peer coaching to build upon parallel learning with teachers. Common practices today include teachers that who “work shoulder to shoulder for the good of their students but do not always have opportunities to engage

collaboratively in curricular conversations about their teaching concerns and practices. Their parallel paths do not meet” (Jewett & MacPhee, 2012, p. 109). Structural constraints, such as time, schedules, and overall systems often limit the amount of collaboration taking place in and across schools.

## **Methods**

Two focus groups with elementary school literacy coaches from a central Florida school district provided data for this study. Focus groups revealed perceived effectiveness of professional learning and allowed for literacy coaches to discuss their own learning needs. Focus groups allowed for collaborative participation among literacy coaches while answering key questions during the sessions (Krueger & Casey, 2009). This created dialogue in which literacy coaches built upon one another’s conversation during the facilitation of focus groups.

The focus group protocol (Appendix A) developed by the researcher contained several open ended questions about current practices in professional learning for elementary literacy coaches, as well as perceived needs for future learning experiences. The protocol followed Krueger and Casey’s (2009) recommended sequence: a) introduction; b) key questions; and c) follow-up questions. The researcher established rapport with participants by ensuring confidentiality and securing a private location for the focus groups to take place. A supporting moderator assisted the researcher during focus group sessions by limiting interruptions, tending to audio and video recording technology, and note taking. Consent from each participant was requested prior to audio and video recording. Recordings were transcribed by the researcher. All data were kept secure, confidential, and were disposed of at the conclusion of the study. The process of thematic coding, described by Creswell (1998), supported analysis of the focus group data. To begin coding, the researcher read all transcribed interviews thoroughly. Next,

the researcher noted phrases or key ideas. Lastly, common themes classified into several general categories allowed for interpretation and presentation of the data (Creswell, 1998). Themes identified using this process included: (a) perspectives on current professional learning practices; (b) literacy coaches seek feedback and collaboration; (c) professional learning needs exist in current literacy research, trends, and best practices; and (d) perceived barriers impact literacy coaches' professional learning.

### **Data Sources**

The data sources used to inform this research included two focus group sessions with a convenience sample of elementary literacy coaches from a school district in central Florida. The first focus group consisted of two participants, and eight in the second group. Ten total participants represented approximately one third of the elementary literacy coach population (including elementary academic coaches who identify as literacy focused) in the selected district. These coaches volunteered to participate in the focus group sessions as an additional activity during one of their monthly meetings. The first focus group took place prior to the start of the regularly scheduled meeting, meaning participants volunteered to arrive an hour before required. The second focus group took place during the scheduled lunch break on the same day, meaning participants volunteered their lunch break to participate. The allotted time to conduct focus groups was not ideal, and likely impacted participation; however, minimal opportunities occur in which coaches are together. Time allocated for each session was forty-five minutes, though the first session only lasted thirty minutes.

Additionally, an interview with the district representative who oversees the elementary literacy coaches provided details on the goals of the coaching initiative, its history, barriers, and perceptions of effectiveness. The researcher developed the interview protocol (Appendix A) and

included several open ended questions about current practices in professional learning, as well as perceived professional learning needs for literacy coaches.

Artifacts readily available to the public via the school district's internet site, such as the professional development plan for coaches, coaching resources, and the K-12 district plan were examined to compare with the recorded perceptions from the interview and focus groups. The artifacts, interview data, and a review of the current research defined current perspectives, needs, and strengths for the professional learning of literacy coaches.

### **Findings**

The intent of this study was to determine literacy coaches' needs and perspectives on professional learning. In order to develop credible recommendations, the bulk of the qualitative data collected came from literacy coaches themselves. Analysis of the data collected began with the focus group transcripts. Initially, the researcher identified six themes, which later narrowed into four concise themes (see Table 1). Additional support for each identified theme was triangulated with additional data, either from the district interview and/or artifacts, and is further described in the subsections below.

Table 1. *Themes*

Theme 1	Perspectives on current professional learning practices.
Theme 2	Literacy coaches seek feedback and collaboration.
Theme 3	Professional learning needs in literacy research, trends, and best practices.
Theme 4	Perceived barriers for literacy coaches' professional learning.

#### **A Shift in Professional Learning**

The focus group sessions supported the district's professional learning for the 2015-16 school year shifted toward best practices. This perception was supported with statements such as "Last year's meetings were the 'sit and get' format. This year the one 'sit and get' led us to professional learning as we did today." This school year, literacy coaches met every other month



to conduct learning walks (classroom visits with specific foci, followed by guided discussion). The initial training this school year focused on how to conduct these learning walks. The expectation from the coaching initiative was for learning walks to occur during every content-specific coaches' meeting, which in the case of literacy was the equivalent of three meetings for the 2015-16 school year. Professional learning that is ongoing, such as the implementation of learning walks, is best practice (Easton, 2008).

### **Feedback and Collaboration Are Necessary**

Literacy coaches expressed a need for feedback and collaboration to grow their coaching practices. One focus group participant shared that there “Seems to be a gap [between coaches providing teachers with feedback, but not ever receiving feedback on their practice].” Another coach added on “I really need to know if I am heading in the right direction. I feel like [feedback] is really missing.” Important to note is that school administrators typically evaluate coaches, but often lack expertise in coaching, reducing an opportunity for administrative evaluations to provide ample feedback.

Learning for literacy coaches typically happens independently in isolated environments (Aguilar, 2013; Burkins & Ritchie, 2007; Cornett & Knight, 2009). Mentorships and networking opportunities are critical to the success of literacy coaches (L’Allier & Elish-Piper, 2012). In this study, literacy coaches compared the collaborative structure they desire to Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) established for teachers. They shared, “As coaches we want the opportunity to form relationships with our peers and have conversations. We want the time to work together in and out of our schools.” Structures within the district do not currently support coach-to-coach learning within the school day.

District artifacts supported a need for coaches to be provided time to meet regularly with other coaches. Improved professional learning for literacy coaches happens when coaches engage in dialogue and inquiry with other coaches (Burkins & Ritchie, 2007). Furthermore, the International Literacy Association [ILA] (2015) recommended professional learning activities that involved in-district networks of literacy professionals. The district leader from the coaching initiative shared an awareness that coaches seek feedback and collaboration; however, structural constraints interfered.

### **Current Research, Trends, and Issues in Literacy**

Literacy coaches require a broad repertoire of skills, dispositions, and knowledge, including but not limited to coaching skills and literacy knowledge that spans the elementary grades (ILA, 2015). With only three professional learning days dedicated to literacy in this district, elementary literacy coaches repeatedly expressed their desire for more content specific learning. One literacy coach stated “We really need research on what is relevant in literacy and research on different literacy programs.” Another coach quickly consented with “We haven’t been trained in depth as coaches in English Language Arts (ELA) Common Core... we need specific training and background. . .that will allow us to build capacity with the shifts in ELA.” While most comments referred to professional learning that does not keep literacy coaches abreast of current research, another focus group participant had a valid concern that highlights the importance of supporting literacy content. She shared “I came out of the classroom with a strength in primary grades. I constantly have to research and teach myself how to teach [literacy in] grades 3-5 so that I can help teachers.” It is not unusual for literacy coaches to have experience teaching one or two grade levels, causing quite a learning curve when they transition to coaching grades K-5. In a review of artifacts documenting the professional learning history of

the coaching initiative in this district it is clear time dedicated toward learning how to coach vastly outweighs learning about literacy.

### **Barriers to Literacy Coach Learning**

Literacy coaches readily identified several barriers impacting their professional learning such as ambiguity of the role, time constraints, isolation, and continuous changes. Tasks delegated to elementary literacy coaches often come from the school based administrator. Administrators implement the use literacy coaches based on what they believe is best for the school. This distribution of power leads to varying expectations and no two literacy coaches having the same exact role (Galloway & Lesaux, 2012). A focus group participant explained “We all play a different role at our schools... next steps should be to make it consistent for all coaches across all schools.” It is not atypical for coaches’ roles and responsibilities to vary greatly in the field (L’Allier & Elish-Piper, 2012).

In regard to time constraints that impact learning, literacy coaches shared “We need more time” and “. . .time to talk to others [coaches]. . . and time to talk about what’s most relevant in literacy.” Time constraints led to isolated learning for literacy coaches, leaving resources such as Twitter, educational journals, blogs, and podcasts as some of the learning tools used. An additional concern shared by the focus group participants was that coaching and literacy continually change, along with programs and administrators, making these changes a hindrance to coach development.

### **Implications**

Results from this study, while contextually bound, may inform the school district’s plan for elementary literacy coaches’ professional learning and can additionally be applied to literacy coaches in other contexts. According to the data collected and related literature, three key professional learning components including 1) coaching cycles with collaboration; 2) adaptations

of PLCs for literacy coaches; and 3) addressing literacy research, trends, and best practices have the potential to support literacy coaches' professional learning.

### **Coaching Cycles with Collaboration**

Elementary literacy coaches in this district received specific training on student-centered coaching cycles (Sweeney, 2011). These cycles, developed by Sweeney (2011), include stages of data collection upon initiation and conclusion of a coaching cycle. The four stages in the model are: (1) set a standards-based goal; (2) assess students to determine performance with the goal; (3) implement instruction; and (4) reassess to see if students met the goal (Sweeney, 2011). This model alleviates the need to measure a coach's effectiveness by using student data to demonstrate learning impact (Sweeney, 2011). It also provides the district with a common coaching language for various types of coaches (literacy, academic, math, science, writing). The district requires all coaches to document a minimum of two student-centered coaching cycles per school year, which supports documentation for federal funding that is typically used to pay coaches' salaries.

As two literacy professionals, Burkins and Ritchie (2007) developed a model for coach-to-coach cycles. In this model, a "guest coach" visits the "home coach" to observe the home coach in all stages of the coaching cycle (pre-observation meeting, observation, debrief). Once the coaching cycle is complete, the guest coach provides feedback to the home coach (Burkins & Ritchie, 2007). This model has the potential to improve coaching skills, as well as content knowledge.

By merging the aforementioned student-centered coaching cycles with the coach-to-coach model, the need for feedback and collaboration among literacy coaches is alleviated.

There are implications for the school district of focus to ensure structural support exists that allows coaches to conduct coaching cycles together.

### **Adapted Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)**

Elementary schools within the district use the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model within their weekly schedules to support collaborative learning among teachers (DuFour, 2004). These sessions typically take on an extended amount of planning time for teachers to discuss student learning and instructional decisions. Coaches often participate in PLCs with teachers to gain an understanding of what is happening in each grade level. Established PLCs support communication, collaboration, and goals within a school building.

If adapted to meet the needs of literacy coaches, PLCs could provide the collaborative time coaches cited as a need. This variation of the PLC model would require scheduling and structural changes which would permit coaches to visit other schools for the sessions. These requirements veer from the original intent of PLCs; however, the reality warrants adaptations to meet the learning needs of coaches. Additionally, the language literacy coaches used during the focus group sessions to describe their need for collaboration included the term PLC.

Background knowledge and previous experiences with the PLC model validates the need to adapt the model to meet the needs of elementary literacy coaches. Incorporating PLCs for coaches would happen in addition to the current operating practices with PLCs for teachers.

### **Literacy Research, Trends, and Best Practices**

Isolated learning environments, limited opportunities to gather with other literacy coaches, and diverse, ever-changing needs across schools and literacy programs highlight the need for elementary literacy coaches to have extensive knowledge of literacy. An essential component of a professional learning system for literacy coaches must address how to stay

abreast of current research, trends, and best practices in literacy. There are implications for dedicating time toward cultivating literacy knowledge for elementary literacy coaches. This study highlighted the minimal amount of time this district allocates to content-specific learning for its coaches. Literature for addressing a diverse group of learners, such as elementary literacy coaches, with varying backgrounds, years of experience, and career goals, suggests incorporating differentiation within professional learning settings (Galloway & Lesaux, 2012; L’Allier & Elish-Piper, 2012). A differentiated approach during monthly coaches’ meetings would allow for development in multiple literacy topics simultaneously. Additionally, providing learning topics with various small groups affords literacy coaches the opportunity to select the option that is most relevant to their needs.

### **Limitations**

Implications and decisions based on these study results may be limited by the small sample size, researcher bias, and methodological limitations associated with reported perceptions. The study captured perspectives from one third of a single school district’s population of elementary literacy coaches. Additionally, caution in regard to the researcher’s positionality as a former literacy coach within the school district is necessary, though that could potentially serve as a benefit as well. Last, the selected methodology was advantageous for gathering collective needs and perspectives; however, this method provides one layer of data for a multifaceted problem. It is recommended for further research to span beyond one school district and increase the number of participants.

### **Conclusion**

Current educational reforms and increased demands for more rigorous standards, instruction, and learning make the role of the literacy coach even more critical. This study served

as a starting point for future work in capturing current professional learning perspectives and needs from elementary literacy coaches. It called to action the need to transform learning opportunities for elementary literacy coaches to meet research based best practices in professional learning. By shifting to professional learning practices, opportunities provided to literacy coaches should include feedback and collaboration, while improving literacy content knowledge and coaching skills. Insights gained from the field alongside relevant literature assisted in the development of the aforementioned implications and recommendations for improved learning experiences for elementary literacy coaches.

## APPENDIX A

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL FOR LITERACY COACHES

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVE



### **Protocol: Focus Groups for Elementary Literacy Coaches**

**Format:** If possible, the seating arrangement for the room will be in a circle, with the facilitator as part of the circle (on the same level as the coaches). A welcome and introductions will take place. The moderator will circulate the exterior of the circle and tend to audio/visual equipment. Preferably, the circle will be empty (no furniture). Coaches will be provided with a clipboard and paper for jotting down thoughts before engaging in conversation. With permission from each participant, the paper will be collected at the conclusion of the focus group meeting.

**Materials needed:** snacks, clipboards, pencils for each participant

**Rationale:** Participants will receive a brief overview of the study. IRB Exempt, Informed Consent, and use of pseudonyms will be explained so participants can opt to participate. Explain goals for the focus group meeting and establish norms and expectations, as well as the role of facilitator and moderator. Explain video/audio recording. A brief explanation of the differences between professional development and professional learning will also take place (and possibly a chart paper referencing the two will be posted).

#### **Opening Question:**

Tell me who you are, where you coach, and one thing you enjoy outside of work.

#### **Introductory Question(s):**

- 1.! Tell me about how you currently participate in professional learning (how often, on what topics)?

#### **Transition Questions:**

- 2.! How has professional learning informed your coaching practice? Can you provide an example?
- 3.! What types of professional learning are most beneficial to you? Why? Who provides the types you prefer most?

#### **Key Questions:**

- 4.! Please list/describe some of your greatest learning needs for improved literacy coaching. *(participants will list on paper prior to opening up for discussion; demographic info can be collected on this paper as well at the end of the session).*
- 5.! How do you seek learning opportunities that will foster your growth as a coach?
- 6.! In your opinion, what would be most helpful in supporting your work?
- 7.! How do you stay informed of current research on best practices and trends in literacy education?

#### **Ending Questions:**

- 8.! We want to know how to improve the professional learning you currently participate in. Do you have thoughts or suggestions about how your professional learning could be enhanced? What types of formats/practices are you in need of?
- 9.! Is there anything else you would like to share?

## Interview Protocol for the School District Supervisor of Elementary Literacy Coaches

### Title 1 Coaching Initiative

Purpose: The purpose of this interview is to provide historical insight on the elementary literacy coach position, as well as provide future directions of the coaching program at a central Florida school district. Additionally, the interview will capture past and current professional development practices for elementary literacy coaches, as well as goals for the future.

1-Demographics	Please tell me a little about your current position and past experiences in education.	<input type="checkbox"/> How long have you been teaching? What grade levels? How many years did you spend coaching? What preparation do you have for coaching (certification, endorsements, experiences, etc.) Current position?
2- Goals	<input type="checkbox"/> Please share the district's current goals for the coaching initiative (2015-16 school year).	<input type="checkbox"/> What are the professional learning goals for literacy coaches? <input type="checkbox"/> What goals do you expect coaches to meet at each of their sites?
3- History	<input type="checkbox"/> Can you provide/share a general, historical timeline of the district's coaching initiative since the introduction of the program?	<input type="checkbox"/> Types of professional learning for coaches, decision making for coaches: Have PD plans for coaches changed over time? How? Why?
4- Current	<input type="checkbox"/> How do you ensure or gauge the professional growth of coaches? <input type="checkbox"/> How do you ensure that coaches have the knowledge to handle literacy trends and shifts that teachers and students are experiencing? <input type="checkbox"/> What are the current literacy plans for the district for teachers and students? How does this plan align with professional learning and support for coaches? <input type="checkbox"/> Please explain the varying titles of Instructional Coaches and how/why the title is assigned to	<input type="checkbox"/> How is coaches' growth and effectiveness measured or gauged? <input type="checkbox"/> How is professional growth monitored in coaches? <input type="checkbox"/> Who provides district support to coaches? What type and how often? <input type="checkbox"/> How are professional learning goals for coaches communicated between you and school administrators?

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**Teaching Online Research and Comprehension Skills through Guided Reading**

**Jennifer H. Van Allen**

**Lehman College**



## **Abstract**

Many leaders in various fields are calling for increased integration of digital literacies into the school curriculum, including the ability to find and evaluate information on the Internet. However, there is minimal evidence to suggest that these skills are successfully taught to students due to many factors. The purpose of this case study was to examine the juxtaposition of online research and comprehension skills within the guided reading framework. In particular, this study explored how a fourth grade teacher implemented online research and comprehension skills in guided reading lessons along with the role changes and challenges for the student and teacher. Results showed that online guided reading had many unique differences from the traditional guided reading framework. In addition, there were many role changes for the teacher and students, technological challenges, student challenges, and instructional challenges that occurred throughout the study. Implications for modifying the traditional guided reading framework and continuing challenges are discussed.

## **Introduction**

Digital literacy is at the forefront of conversation. According to a recent Pew Report on the digital future, “the world is moving rapidly towards ubiquitous connectivity that will further change how and where people associate, gather and share information, and consume media” (Pew Research Center, 2014, p. 1). Many business leaders and policymakers recognize that college and career readiness requires our students to use new technologies to locate information, critically evaluate and analyze that information, collaborate and connect with others, produce and share information, and achieve personal, professional, and academic goals (Coiro, 2011; Johnson & Kress, 2003; Pew Research Center, 2014). In addition, the United States Department of Education, school districts, and leading literacy professional organizations are calling for increased integration of digital literacies into the school curriculum, including the ability to find and evaluate information on the Internet (International Reading Association [IRA], 2009; National Council of Teachers of English [NCTE], 2013).

Despite these calls for increased integration of digital literacies, researchers have indicated that many teachers are not utilizing these technologies to their fullest potential in their instruction even though students prefer learning through and are more engaged with instruction that integrates interactive digital tools (Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009; Hutchison & Reinking, 2011). In a national survey of United States teachers’ perceptions of technology integration, Hutchison and Reinking (2011) found a gap between teachers’ perceived importance of technology integration and actual use. Although almost all literacy teachers thought technology should be integrated into instruction, only 38% of teachers used technology as a presentation tool and less than 10% of teachers included technology in authentic, learner

centered ways (Hutchison & Reinking, 2011). One of the main barriers to the inclusion of technology is lack of knowledge and understanding of how to use technology to enhance teaching and explicitly teach specific technological skills to students (An & Reigeluth, 2011-2012; Hutchison & Reinking, 2011; Hutchison, 2012). As Cole (2014) noted, “It’s not about the apps or the programs. It’s about adding value to effective, thoughtful teaching” (p. 48).

When I was a literacy coach in a large urban school district in Central Florida, I often coached teachers in using the guided reading framework to focus their instruction and better meet all students’ needs. As a firm believer in the power of guided reading instruction to support and nurture blossoming readers, I began to consider how this supportive framework could be used to enhance teaching and learning of online research and comprehension skills. The purpose of this study was to examine the juxtaposition of online research and comprehension skills within the guided reading framework in an upper elementary classroom. The main research question addressed was: How does a teacher use the guided reading framework to develop students’ online research and comprehension skills? In addition, the following sub-questions were addressed:

- How does the role of the teacher and students change with the introduction of online texts during a guided reading lesson in a fourth-grade classroom?
- What challenges do the teacher and the students face with the integration of online research and comprehension within the guided reading framework?

## **Literature Review**

### **Online Research and Comprehension Skills**

According to IRA (2009), “to become fully literate in today’s world, students must become proficient in the new literacies of 21<sup>st</sup> century technologies” (para. 1), including the use

of search engines, webpages, email, blogs, wikis, podcasts, YouTube, etc. Additionally, 21<sup>st</sup> century employees have to manage countless amounts of information from a variety of sources daily; without the required skills needed to process information effectively, employees are ill equipped to handle their roles and responsibilities (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek & Henry, 2013; Wagner, 2008). Researchers have shown that many students are not able to effectively engage in online research and comprehension skills (Coiro, 2011; Leu et al., 2015).

So, what are the skills required by online research and how are these comprehension skills different from traditional texts? Readers use similar reading strategies when reading unbounded online texts, such as websites, audio, video, hyperlinks, and images, as when reading bounded offline, traditional texts, such as books, textbooks, and newspapers (Coiro & Dobler, 2007). All readers must rely on word recognition strategies to decode unknown words and vocabulary strategies to determine the meaning of unfamiliar words. However, online research and comprehension is not isomorphic with traditional comprehension skills (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek, & Henry, 2013). Online comprehension skills build on traditional reading strategies typically activated when reading informational texts (i.e., activating prior knowledge, making inferences, and self-regulation of reading processes), but are inherently more complex and extend the application of these reading strategies in many ways (Coiro & Dobler, 2007). For example, when activating prior knowledge readers of traditional texts must recall experiences and information related to the topic; whereas, online readers must also have additional knowledge of website structures and search engines in order to locate relevant information. In another example, all readers must infer meaning from text using context and structural cues to read between the lines. Online readers must also make forward inferences, predicting which hyperlinks will hold the information they seek and managing multilayered reading processes

(through self-chosen navigation of nonlinear hyperlinks) across multidimensional Internet spaces (encompassing multiple forms of media texts) (Coiro, 2003; Coiro & Dobler, 2007).

Leu et al. (2013) identified five processing strategies that include the skills, knowledge, and dispositions necessary for online research and comprehension: “read to identify important questions, read to locate information, read to evaluate information critically, read to synthesize information, and read to communicate information” (p. 1164). Since most Internet reading is conducted to solve a problem or answer a question, readers must begin with a driving question that exemplifies their current understanding of the issue at hand. Next, readers locate information through effective keyword generation, identify websites that may include valuable information in search engine results, and efficiently scan a website’s information for relevant facts or data. As readers process the information found within a website or across multiple webpages and sources, they must evaluate the information for bias, accuracy, and reliability and then synthesize the information to form a general understanding of their problem or answer to their question. Finally, readers often communicate new information to peers or others through email, blogs or wikis. All of these processes happen quickly, often, and simultaneously making online research and comprehension a complex activity (Leu et al., 2013). In addition, O’Byrne and McVerry (2009) found that students’ dispositions towards online research and readings task have an effect on online research and comprehension skills. Three factors were found to be significant in developing students’ dispositions of online reading: persistence, reflection, and collaboration (O’Byrne & McVerry, 2009).

A recent study conducted by Leu et al. (2015) examined the online research and comprehension skills of seventh-grade students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds through performance based assessments. Findings indicated that while 50% of students from

economically advantaged backgrounds were able to successfully complete the tasks, only 21% of students from disadvantaged backgrounds were able to do so. In fact, Leu and his colleagues concluded that the reading achievement gap is even larger than expected because current assessments do not measure these skills. How do we guide students through these complex skills and help them develop essential dispositions necessary for online research?

### **Guided Reading**

One of today's most popular teaching frameworks for teaching strategic reading processes to small groups of students is the guided reading framework (Ford & Opitz, 2011). The essential components of the guided reading framework date back to Betts' Directed Reading Activity (as cited in Ford & Opitz, 2011) which provided students with targeted guidance in reading strategies when confronting an unknown text. Since this first acknowledgement, the framework has been revised throughout the years to reflect researchers' concerns and educators' needs. The most recent version of this framework has been proposed by Fountas and Pinnell (2001) as guided reading and is most familiar to teachers as a common element of the reading block. According to Fountas and Pinnell (2012), "The goal of guided reading is to help students build their reading power—to build a network of strategic actions for processing texts" (p. 272). Guided reading consists of a structured five part lesson including strategic text selection based on a group of students' needs, a meaningful text introduction, individual student reading of the text, group discussion of the text, and targeted teaching points, plus two optional parts—word work and text extension (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Through this process, teachers prompt and support students as they engage with the text, and lead the group through an analysis, evaluation, and critique of the text with a thoughtful discussion and targeted teaching points (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

In addition to traditional literacy skills, such as efficient decoding strategies and purpose setting, online research and comprehension requires additional processes and strategic actions to fully comprehend text (Coiro, 2011). Fountas and Pinnell's (2012) guided reading framework includes a network of processing systems of reading that include thinking within the text, thinking about the text, and thinking beyond the text. As students think within the text, they engage in more traditional processes of reading such as solving words, reading fluency, and monitoring strategies that enable comprehension of a text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Processes included in thinking beyond the text and thinking about the text require readers to engage in critical thinking as they predict, make connections, synthesize, infer, analyze, and critique the information being presented (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). These strategic actions apply to readers in both traditional and digital literacies. When reading digital texts, the actions associated with thinking beyond and about the text must be more carefully and strategically utilized. Given the supportive nature, explicit modeling, and prompting strategies used by the teacher during guided reading instruction, the guided reading framework could be one vessel for teaching students skills and strategies required by online research and comprehension.

### **Theoretical Framework**

New literacies theory was used to frame the context of this study. Grounded in the belief that the definition of literacy is ever changing due to rapidly developing technologies and the new discourses, social practices, and skills surrounding these technologies, Leu et al. (2013) proposed a dual level theory of new literacies. These authors agreed that the term new literacies could stand for many types of literacy resulting from multimodal texts and new technologies. Lowercase new literacies theory defines the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for specific areas of new literacies, specifically surrounding online research and comprehension in

this study (Leu et al., 2013). Whereas, uppercase New Literacies theory examines the broad “common and consistent patterns being found in lowercase literacies and lines of research (Leu et al., 2013, p. 1157). Therefore, uppercase New Literacies theory is based upon principles that guide understanding of lowercase new literacies as they are being explored, such as the following ideas:

- The Internet is this defining literacy and learning within our world
- Use of the Internet requires new forms of strategic knowledge and skills
- The role of the teacher is changing with the incorporation of new technologies in instruction (Leu et al., 2013)

Lowercase new literacies theory of online research and comprehension identifies more specific principles related to Internet use:

- Each reader uniquely constructs knowledge through a self-chosen reading path
- Five strategic processes are required
- Online texts are considerate and may support struggling readers
- Many students struggle with online research and comprehension without direct instruction in these skills
- Collaborative environments improve students’ comprehension of and learning through online texts (Leu et al., 2013).

### **Methodology**

This study utilized a qualitative research design. Through an in-depth analysis of research and case study approach (Creswell, 2013), I examined how one teacher used the guided reading framework to develop students’ online research and comprehension skills in a fourth grade classroom. In addition, I explored how the role of the teacher and students changed as



online research and comprehension instruction was embedded into guided reading lessons.

Finally, I sought to understand the instructional challenges teachers faced as they taught students online research and comprehension skills and the learning challenges students faced as they navigated the complex Internet environment to find, locate, evaluate, critique, and synthesize information from a variety of multimodal sources.

### **Participant**

I selected a small, purposive, convenience sampling (Creswell, 2013) of a fourth grade teacher at a moderately sized Title 1 elementary school in central Florida set within a large urban school district. The school served a diverse population of approximately 650 students with 43% Black, 27% White, 24% Hispanic, and 2% other races. Despite moderate access to technology, authentic use of these devices by students was scarce. Computers were most frequently used to access the computer-based instructional program required by the school, take Accelerated Reader quizzes, and take other school and district computerized assessments.

Rachel, a fourth grade teacher at the school volunteered to participate in this study and met the requirements of teaching literacy to a group of students and utilizing the guided reading framework to drive her small group reading instruction. According to Creswell (2013), case studies often require the researcher to build relationships with those at the study site to gain more in depth information from participants. This relationship was already in place because I had worked closely with Rachel for over a year as her literacy coach.

### **Data Sources**

**Interviews.** An initial interview was conducted with Rachel before the start of the case study to gather relevant background information about previous teaching and educational experiences, level of comfort and experience with technology and online research skills, and her

current understanding of the types of skills students need to be successful with online research and comprehension. In addition, weekly interviews were conducted with Rachel during the course of the study. These interviews were designed to examine the guided reading components that were most useful in teaching online research and comprehension to students, the ways the roles of both the teacher and students shifted during implementation, and the teaching and learning challenges associated with the implementation of online research and comprehension in guided reading lessons. Each interview lasted approximately 15 minutes.

**Daily Reflection Logs.** During the study, Rachel completed daily reflection logs to gather data about the skills she chose to teach and her rationale, her approach to teaching these skills, the instructional successes and challenges she experienced daily, and the learning successes and challenges the students experienced daily. Prior to the weekly interviews, the reflection logs were reviewed by myself so that I could further probe into the decisions she made as she implemented these lessons and clarify any questions I had from the reflection logs during the interview.

## **Data Analysis**

Findings from the teacher reflection logs and interviews were examined using thematic analysis methods (Creswell, 2013). Each interview was fully transcribed and coded for themes. Additionally, the teacher reflection log was collected and also reviewed for emerging themes. First, I read through the data set making margin notes of key ideas to get an overall sense of the data. Next, I used categorical aggregation methods to form codes of instances that repeated themselves within the data. Subsequent readings of interview transcriptions and teacher reflection logs were color coded with specific evidence for each code. I then grouped the codes into like categories based upon patterns observed in the data. Finally, I reread the data set

considering the categories and their relationship to the research questions to form final themes for describing and interpreting the case (Creswell, 2013).

### **Description of the Case**

Rachel, a white, middle-aged female was responsible for teaching two sections of English/Language Arts classes each day. Rachel had been teaching for seven years and had acquired her professional teaching certificate through alternative certification courses and examinations after receiving her bachelor's degree in child development. Rachel was already familiar with the guided reading framework and utilized this framework daily in her small group instruction; however, she had little experience with student instruction in online research and comprehension skills. According to Rachel, technology had been central to her personal and professional life since she was young and she considered herself technology proficient. Rachel was an avid technology user at home noting that devices were her "main link of communication to my friends and family . . . where I create things, where I keep images." In addition, she believed that technology integration was important in education because "everything is technology bound."

When describing technology use in her classroom, Rachel reported that she used the SMART board daily in interactive lessons. "They (the students) get up and use it for writing to show their work . . . that allows me to see what they know." During the school year in which the study took place, Rachel indicated that her students had not really had access to the devices for research because of limited time and school mandates. "When they are on the computers, they are on the (reading) programs." However, Rachel noted that in previous years she had engaged students in small group and individual projects in which they used devices to research topics and create final products, including typed essays and PowerPoint presentations. Although Rachel

believed that teaching students how to use technology properly was an important 21<sup>st</sup> century skill, she explained that she was sometimes uneasy about allowing students open access to the Internet without close supervision “because of the access that they could potentially have to certain sites.”

Prior to the study, I provided a brief one-hour professional development (PD) session to Rachel to define online research and comprehension, guide her baseline understanding of the skills and strategies needed by students to engage in online research and comprehension, help generate instructional ideas for lesson development, provide her with resources, and provide clear expectations and guidelines for the study (see Table 1 for a description of the PD). During the initial interview, I determined that Rachel had a good working knowledge of Internet and search strategies based on descriptions of her own Internet use. For example, she described how she used Boolean search operators to narrow search results, consulted multiple web sources to verify information, and carefully critiqued information she found on the Internet by examining the creator’s credentials and looking for signs of bias. Therefore, the PD alerted her to all of the strategies identified in research as important to online research and comprehension (Leu et al., 2013), but focused more on instructional approaches and resources for lessons implementation.

After the PD, Rachel was provided with six Lenovo ThinkPad laptops running Windows 8 for a total of three weeks. Rachel self-selected a group of students to target for this instruction based on her knowledge of the group’s needs and comfort using technology. She decided to work with her high reading group (six students) because she knew their reading level would not interfere with the focus of the lessons on online research and comprehension skills. Rachel was able to implement these lessons ten days over a three-week period. The second interview was

conducted after the first week in which Rachel implemented the lessons daily with students.

Table 1

*Professional Development Sequence*

Purpose	Description
Provided a rationale and purpose	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Briefly defined online research and comprehension skills</li> <li>2. Watched a video <i>Smart Online Search Tips for Kids</i> (<a href="https://youtu.be/pqGlhNDx7_k">https://youtu.be/pqGlhNDx7_k</a>)</li> <li>3. Discussed the necessity of online research skills in education today</li> </ol>
Explored a topic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Prompted to search for information on the Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus</li> <li>5. Recorded actions and types of thinking that occurred during the search</li> <li>6. Discussed these actions and thinking skills in relations to students</li> </ol>
Defined five online research strategies and dispositions of online readers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Provided an explicit definition for each, while discussing what it would look like for a student to employ the strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read to identify important questions or solve a problem</li> <li>• Read to locate information</li> <li>• Read to evaluate information critically</li> <li>• Read to synthesize information</li> <li>• Read to communicate information</li> </ul> </li> <li>8. Discussed the need for online readers to have specific qualities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Persistence</li> <li>• Reflection</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> </ul> </li> <li>9. Provided examples of how these dispositions could be fostered during lessons</li> </ol>
Introduced specific instructional approaches	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>10. Described the Internet Reciprocal Teaching (Castek, 2008) approach</li> <li>11. Described think-alouds and provided her with two examples</li> <li>12. Discussed specific routines using these approaches within lessons</li> </ol>
Provided resources for lessons	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. Explored specific web resources that could be used in lesson planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common Sense Media (<a href="https://www.commonsensemedia.org/educators">https://www.commonsensemedia.org/educators</a>)</li> <li>• GoogleSearch Education (<a href="https://www.google.com/intl/en-us/insidesearch/searcheducation/index.html">https://www.google.com/intl/en-us/insidesearch/searcheducation/index.html</a>)</li> </ul> </li> <li>14. Explored the laptops students would be using</li> </ol>
Provided specific expectations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15. Discussed specific expectations of the study and nonnegotiables</li> <li>16. Scheduled follow up interviews</li> </ol>

Since she was unable to meet with the group consistently during the second week due to absences, school events, technical challenges, and schedule changes, she continued instruction into the third week. The third interview was conducted at the conclusion of the third week.

### **Lesson Implementation**

Rachel decided to begin her implementation of these lessons by first introducing students to the computers they would be using and ensuring they had basic web searching skills. Her first and second lesson ensured the students were able to power on the devices, log in successfully, and assessed student knowledge of basic computer skills, such as powering the computer on/off, opening programs and applications, navigating to search engines, toggling between windows and applications, and using the navigation buttons on web browsers (Leu et al., 2008). During these lessons, Rachel stated that, “The students were able to do much more than expected. They just learned as they played.” However, she also noted students’ unfamiliarity with web browsers as students struggled to identify a difference between the search bar and address bar when visiting a search engine.

After Rachel was sure that students had ample skills to navigate their devices and basic navigation skills within a web browser, she introduced students to a teacher generated question, “Who has controlled Florida and how has their control or action affected others?” Rachel chose this question as a topic of study because it was directly related to an upcoming social studies unit and she thought the first part of the question would lead to skill instruction that would support students in answering the more complex second part of the question. Her next two lessons centered on using strategies to understand the question by setting up notes, breaking the question into its two parts, and creating key words or phrases for their search. During the lesson in which students set up their notes in a Word document, Rachel noted that “the students struggle with

typing, they hunt and peck,” making the lesson take longer than initially expected. To ensure that students understood the question, she started the next lesson by asking students “What should they search for? What things would they type into the search box in order to get an answer to their questions?” Rachel stated that this check for understanding at the beginning of the lesson was imperative for ensuring students understood the question and guided the types of supports she provided as students generated key words (who, controlled, and Florida) to answer the first part of their question “Who has controlled Florida?”

Next, Rachel guided students to read through and examine the structure of a search engine results page. She began the lesson by reviewing the question and key words with students. Then had students search the key words on their own computers, using the search engine of their choice, which was Google in all cases. Once students had pulled up the results list, she asked them to discuss which link was the best one to visit first. As students began to debate their choices, she led them in a discussion of knowing more about the website by looking at the URLs to determine the author or supporting organization and domain extensions (.com, .org., .edu). Rachel observed students begin using the URL in their discussions, such as, “So this is a good site because it has an organization. This is a National Geographic site or a Wikipedia.”

Rachel quickly moved on to guiding students in locating information on websites for the next three lessons while reinforcing key word generation and examining the search results page. During these lessons, Rachel helped students examine the difference between reading on a webpage versus a book or article and use the text features to locate relevant information. She reflected on a misunderstanding one student had during these lessons and how her prompting helped him gain a new understanding about search results.

One of them went to a site . . . and he was like what is this? I was like, well, let's go back. This is the one you clicked on from the search results. Read this snippet. Does this give you any sort of, you know, tell you anything about what you were looking for? He said, "no." And I asked why he clicked on it? He said he didn't know. He was just clicking to click. That's when he discovered that noticing the little brief description, snippet, of what the site is going to give you can help.

Rachel noticed that these lessons prompted students to collaborate with each other in their search for relevant information. "There's a lot more conversation . . . they are talking a lot more about what they've learned and . . . talking about what they are finding."

To conclude the study, Rachel spent the last three lessons guiding students as they read information across multiple pages in one website, with the main focus of these lessons on how to identify and use hyperlinks appropriately. Throughout these lessons, Rachel noticed that, "Students got confused and sidetracked with what they were actually looking for," as they navigated through hyperlinks to go to multiple webpages. Her guidance and prompting with questions such as, "What's your question? What are you looking for? Does this site give you any information? . . . Where do we need to go next?" were necessary to help students stay focused on their purpose, use the web browser features effectively (back and forward icons), and manage the multiple layers of a website successfully. During these lessons, students were constantly using the skills they learned in previous lessons to make sense of the information. Rachel described another instance in which a student used the timeline on the webpage to identify an incorrect assumption and then conducted another search to clarify.

One of them read something about Cuba and took it as Cuba controlling Florida. I said, "Ok, wait, but you've read and you've seen the timeline. Is Cuba on there, on the



timeline and on the site?” She said, “No, it wasn’t.” I then asked her how she felt about Cuba controlling Florida. She’s like, “I don’t know, it doesn’t make sense.” So I said, “Ok, well how would we find out if Cuba controlled Florida?” She said, “Well, I’d just do another search” . . . So she opened up another window and searched. She found that that’s one of the reasons why Spain traded with Great Britain, for Cuba. So, she made that connection.

During the course of this study, Rachel was able to introduce students to three of the five processing practices for online research found by Leu et al. (2013): read to identify important questions, read to locate information, and read to evaluate information critically. Students became much more proficient at identifying key words for their searches and using the search engine results to locate relevant websites.

## **Findings**

The purpose of this study was to examine and explore the perspectives of one teacher’s implementation of guided reading lessons when teaching online research and comprehension skills to fourth grade students. In particular, role changes and challenges were the focus of this research.

### **Usage of the Guided Reading Framework**

A traditional guided reading lesson generally consists of three parts (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). The purpose of the before reading portion is to focus the lesson and orient students to the purpose. The teacher selects a text based on student needs, introduces students to the text using key vocabulary to preview the concepts in the text, and helps students set a purpose for reading the text often reminding them to engage in strategic reading processes. The purpose of the during reading part is to have students engage in strategic processing of instructional level text

with support. While the students are independently reading the text, the teacher checks in with individual students by listening to the student read aloud, asking questions, and prompting strategic actions. Finally, the purpose of the after reading portion of the lesson is to foster discussion about the text and extend students' strategic actions. After reading the text, the teacher prompts students to respond with personal reactions and questions and encourages other students to respond. Then the lesson concludes with the teacher making a couple of explicit teaching points that prompt students to reread and critique the text or practice engaging in a strategic action (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

A clear connection can be made between Rachel's lessons in this study and the different portions and components of the guided reading framework. At the beginning of each lesson Rachel selected a focus and helped students understand the purpose of the lesson. Additionally, she provided students with support through prompts and reminders during each of the lessons. According to Rachel, she spent most of her time during lessons "questioning them (the students) and their thinking" with probing questions and used their responses to direct their searching and reading skills, an essential component during guided reading. These probing questions facilitated student discussion, another important component of the guided reading framework. Rachel stated "they (the students) are talking a lot more about what they've learned." Finally, Rachel planned for one or two specific teaching points in each lesson and often revisited these teaching points in subsequent lessons, as often happens within the sequence of the guided reading framework.

However, Rachel also had to modify many of the components of guided reading to accommodate for the unique differences between traditional guided reading versus guided reading when teaching online research and comprehension skills, termed online guided reading

(see Table 2). Initially, when planning, Rachel realized that she would not be able to choose a common instructional level text for students in her group to read as is done traditionally within the guided reading framework. Instead, she chose to focus students on a common question for inquiry around which they would self-select texts. Although distinctly different from traditional guided reading, this structure prompted more student choice, “a high level of engagement”, and collaboration with their individual texts. For example, Rachel commented that she often heard student say “Oh, hey, go to this website, this one’s got some good information.” In addition, Rachel also found that she needed to use the introduction at the beginning of the lessons as the main teaching point in order to better focus students’ attention on a particular aspect of online research and build academic language. While this may have been the main teaching point, she noticed that other impromptu teaching points were needed throughout the lesson to address misconceptions or redirect the group, as opposed to making the teaching points at a structured time within the lesson. Then, often in response to these teaching points, she noticed that students’ discussion occurred throughout the lesson, especially during reading and after reading.

Someone will say “Oh I found this!” and then someone will correct them and say, “No, it actually says, if you read it, it says this and this is what it means.” So I just kind of just, say yeah, ok, why? Why do you think that? And then they talk about it.

In these ways, Rachel found that she needed to adapt the structure of the traditional guided reading framework to allow for more fluid movement between her prompts, teaching points, and student discussion when utilizing online texts.

### **Role Changes for the Teacher and Students**

The traditional guided reading structure places the teacher at the center of lessons. However, the data clearly indicated that the role of the teacher and students changed when online

research and comprehensions skills were introduced within the guided reading framework (see Table 2). Rachel found that during this implementation her role changed from a guide who led a structured lesson to a facilitator that prompted and supported students as needed. “They (the students) led the conversations . . . I didn’t have to start it with them . . . I would just pop in to get them to give me more and to get them to think in a different way.” She found that students often led the lesson, started the discussion, guided other students in navigating web browsers or search engines, and helped others engage in strategy use.

I sat back and let them tell me where they were going and when I felt that they would maybe go off . . . the direction I wanted them to go, I would guide them back . . . I would ask some probing questions and they just kind of took over and went searching and trying to find their answer.

Table 2

*Traditional Guided Reading Versus Online Guided Reading Roles and Components*

	<b>Traditional Guided Reading</b>	<b>Online Guided Reading</b>
<b>Components</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follows typical lesson structure (Before, during, and after reading parts)</li> <li>• Introduction supports readers as reading</li> <li>• All students read a common text</li> <li>• Planned teaching points</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure is fluid, frequently moving between prompting, discussion, and teaching points</li> <li>• Introduction is used as main teaching point</li> <li>• Students may be reading different, related texts or sections of text</li> <li>• Flexible, impromptu teaching points throughout lesson</li> </ul>
<b>Roles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher selects text</li> <li>• Teacher acts as structured guide</li> <li>• Teacher leads the conversation</li> <li>• Moderate level of student collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students select text with teacher guidance</li> <li>• Teacher acts as unstructured facilitator</li> <li>• Students lead the conversation</li> <li>• High level of student collaboration</li> </ul>

In this way, the roles of the students changed from participants with less control of the choices made, responsible for responding to the teacher prompts in traditional guided reading, to highly

active participants, responsible for sharing their ideas, results, and strategies with others in the group. According to Rachel, “Even if they weren’t sitting next to each other, they would be talking across the table” and were “thoroughly enjoying it.”

Rachel’s implementation of lessons teaching online research and comprehension skills within a guided reading context resulted in many challenges and role changes which were met with enthusiasm by Rachel and her students. In fact Rachel stated, “they (the lessons) went really well. The kids were really excited. They loved using the touchscreen computers, the laptops, and they were really into it . . . they are literally my first students to be at that back table.”

## **Challenges**

Technological challenges, student challenges, and instructional challenges were recurring themes within the data. These recurring themes and patterns are summarized in Table 3. The following subsections explain technology issues experienced in the case study and methodological limitations.

**Technology Issues.** One of the greatest challenges that occurred during the study were “the computers themselves and the struggle to keep them working.” At least four of the ten days Rachel identified issues with the devices as a challenge. For example, Rachel stated, “On the first day, we found out that two of the computers would not turn on!” Other technology issues that occurred were devices that shut down in the middle of lessons, problems connecting to the Internet, dropped connectivity during lessons, and problems signing in to the computers because other students had not previously signed out of their accounts. Rachel attempted to resolve many of these technology challenges by troubleshooting the issues herself. If her troubleshooting attempts failed, she had students pair up to share the laptops. In some ways the computer sharing

provided students with more opportunities to collaborate with others. “The students that were sharing were like, go look at this site, this is a good site. Or sometimes they said let me type this because I can type faster than you. So they helped each other out.”

**Students’ Lack of Computer Knowledge.** Rachel often remarked on students’ lack of knowledge about the devices and indicated that this lack of knowledge resulted in the need to extend the time spent on each lesson. In particular, typing was a consistent challenge.

I don’t think they have a lot of background knowledge with the keyboard. If they haven’t really used it, you can tell by the typing. They hunt and peck or they know just a couple (of keys) and then they have to ask where the space bar is or how do I get the question mark.

Another challenge posed by students’ lack of knowledge was how to toggle between the web browser and a Word document for note-taking. “They had trouble minimizing things because they weren’t using the tracking pad . . . so, instead of pressing minimize, they would press the exit button and would shut it out completely.” This problem compounded with students’ typing speed prompted Rachel to have students take notes on paper rather than in a Word document to save time. Finally, students did not know how to proceed when they came across a computer that was still logged in under another student’s account.

Sometimes we would get the computers that weren’t logged off from the previous student that had it . . . Some of them would just shut it down so . . . it would take that extra couple of minutes for them to log in and get onto the Internet.

Table 3

*Themes Identified in Data Sources*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Examples in the Data Sources</b>
Successes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There's a lot more conversation (Interview)</li> <li>• Students are very engaged and are learning a lot (Reflection Log)</li> <li>• They just learned as they played (Reflection Log)</li> </ul>
Challenge-Technology Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The struggle to keep them (the computers) working (Interview)</li> <li>• Two of the computers would not turn on (Interview)</li> <li>• Computer died on us during the lesson (Reflection Log)</li> </ul>
Challenge-Students' Lack of Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I don't think they have a lot of background knowledge with the keyboard (Interview)</li> <li>• The students struggled with the difference between a search bar and the address bar (Reflection Log)</li> </ul>
Instructional Challenge-Distractions on the Devices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes they would get off task with all of the new features (Interview)</li> <li>• Getting students to stay on task and not just click on the hyperlinks to go exploring (Reflection Log)</li> </ul>
Instructional Challenge-Student Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They . . . don't necessarily engage in the group discussion (Interview)</li> <li>• The other two were just kind of very quietly taking notes (Interview)</li> </ul>
Instructional Challenge-Time-Consuming Lessons	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I plan for a lot and get through only a bit of it (Interview)</li> <li>• It would take that extra couple of minute for them to log in and get onto the Internet (Interview)</li> <li>• It takes the students a long time to read and take notes and then search for what they didn't understand (Reflection Log)</li> </ul>
Role Changes-Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I sat back and let them tell me where they were going (Interview)</li> <li>• I would ask some probing questions and they just kind of took over (Interview)</li> <li>• I am allowing students to do the majority of the talking within the group (Reflection Log)</li> </ul>
Role Changes-Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They (the students) led the conversations (Interview)</li> <li>• Even if they weren't sitting next to each other, they would be talking across the table (Interview)</li> </ul>

**Instructional Challenges.** Throughout the study, Rachel also noted many instructional challenges that she faced from classroom management with the devices to the amount of time each lesson took. While the devices kept students engaged in the lessons, they were also a distraction. For example, Rachel noted, “I think they had so much fun with these computers that sometimes they would get off task with all of the new features . . . instead of using the keyboard to type, they would pull up the keyboard on screen.” When browsing the Internet for information related to their questions and problems, students were easily distracted by hyperlinks. Rachel reflected on one instance in which two students were sidetracked.

We did that in Wikipedia. You can click on the word Spain and it will take you to what they have on Spain for that particular part . . . I had two students that continued to click and click and click and then were totally not on anything that had to do with it (the topic). So I was like let’s stay focused. This is how we can get in trouble with hyperlinks. We just keep clicking to learn about things, but it’s not what we need to focus on.

In addition, Rachel struggled to engage her shy and reserved students in group discussions. This posed a significant problem for Rachel because she felt those students were missing out on the rich discussion and learning that was occurring among the other students. “They are doing what they need to be doing . . . but they don’t necessarily engage in the group discussion.” Lastly, Rachel shared her frustration with the amount of instructional time needed to implement these lessons. “I plan for a lot and get through only a bit of it.”

### **Methodological Limitations**

Case study designs allow for limited generalizations because of the limited sample size and bounded context to which the study is connected (Creswell, 2013). This study was conducted using a convenience sample at a diverse, Title 1 school serving students in a large,



urban school district. Teachers at this school must consider the specific needs of these students when targeting lessons for instruction. These considerations may be vastly different from the needs of students in different populations. Additionally, the limited sample size of one teacher who was technologically proficient does not lead to a consideration of teachers who struggle to use technology in their personal and/or professional lives. Finally, the length of the study did not allow for the teacher to teach students all of the processing strategies recommended by Leu et al. (2013), leading to limited findings for ways to support teachers in teaching these strategies.

### **Discussion**

Students are increasingly using the Internet to complete schoolwork and view the Internet as a way to access information, collaborate with others, get advice, and store information (Levin & Arafah, 2002). Yet, researchers suggest that schools are not adequately preparing students with the research skills to effectively analyze, evaluate, and synthesize information they receive on the Internet (Leu et al., 2015). Other researchers suggest that schools are not adequately preparing students to be digitally literate, which includes “knowing how and when to use which technologies and knowing which forms and functions are most appropriate for one’s purposes” (Leu et al., 2015; Greenhow et al., 2009).

Even though Rachel faced many challenges and had to navigate many role changes with the implementation of online research and comprehension skills within her guided reading lessons, the successes were evident. These students developed and practiced valuable online research skills, as they learned more about the history of Florida. In addition, Rachel saw evidence of student growth in their discussion and approaches when searching for information and reading information from a website. Rachel’s perspectives and experiences help us infer that the guided reading framework may indeed be a viable way to introduce online research and

comprehension skills to students. However, her experiences also imply that Fountas' and Pinnell's (2012) conceptualization of the guided reading framework may need to be reworked to address the role changes that occur for teachers and students during online guided reading.

When selecting text for traditional guided reading, the teacher considers a group of students' abilities and reading levels (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). In online guided reading, the teacher may choose a topic or concept for inquiry; however, students will likely generate a multitude of search results, resulting in students who have chosen different, yet related texts to read during the lesson. In both traditional and online guided reading, the teacher must prompt and support students to employ strategic actions as they are reading the text or engaging in online inquiries (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Coiro, 2011). Online guided reading requires the teacher to prompt and support extended strategic actions focusing students on how to maneuver through the Internet, varied website structures, and multimodal texts in addition to critical reading skills. When teaching online guided reading, student collaboration is imperative to student success (Coiro, Sekeres, Castek, & Guzniczak, 2014). Consequently, in online guided reading, student collaboration and social interactions must occur during and after students read the text. Finally, the teacher must allow for a flexible structure with impromptu teaching points and fluid movement between prompting, discussion, and reflection.

Throughout the study, Rachel continually commented on students' high levels of enthusiasm and motivation in these lessons. These lessons provided a higher level of student choice than traditional guided reading structures as students made decisions that set their own reading path based on their own set purpose for reading. Researchers have shown that increased student choice in lessons leads to increase engagement and motivation (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014). Therefore, possible implications exist for modifying traditional guided reading structures

to allow students more choice over the specific texts they read. For example, a teacher could choose several books for the group and the students could vote on the specific text they would like to read. Alternatively, the teacher could have students select different texts around a given topic or concept and have students discuss the similarities and differences between their individual texts.

Finally, more research is needed to develop a continuum of skills surrounding online research and comprehension skills. In traditional guided reading, the teacher typically forms groups of students for guided reading instruction based on common strengths and needs (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Then teachers select specific teaching points to extend students skill based on a continuum of literacy skills that describe specific behaviors and understandings at different literacy levels (Fountas & Pinnell, 2010). Although Leu and his colleagues (2008) have created a checklist of skills for online research and comprehension set in different phases that increase in complexity, this checklist does not fully describe specific behaviors and understandings students must develop to obtain specific levels of proficiency with online research skills. However, such a continuum would help teachers assess students' proficiency levels and subsequently plan for instruction.

### **Continuing Challenges**

As eloquently stated by Towndrow and Vallance (2013), "laptops and other mobile devices are not merely disruptive to the status quo, they are, in large part, a replacement for it" (p. 270). One of the challenges to successful integration of online research and comprehension skills into instructional practices, such as guided reading, is changing teacher beliefs and attitudes. Teacher beliefs and attitudes about technology integration can have a great effect on digital implementation initiatives (Hutchison & Reinking, 2011; Straub, 2009). In this study, the

teacher was more confident in her own use of technology, felt supported and encouraged to experiment with technology by school administration, and was, therefore, willing to take risks. However, not all teachers are as willing to explore new practices with technology. Teachers must perceive that the school administration values technology integration, shows flexibility in implementation, and supports teachers through their successes and failed attempts (Straub, 2009). Therefore, understanding and shaping teacher beliefs and the school culture through professional development, providing time for experimentation, and providing time for collaborative work with other teachers is necessary (Straub, 2009). Strong school leadership that is sensitive to these conditions and is able to neutralize problems will increase teachers' willingness to integrate online research and comprehension during guided reading lessons.

As noted by previous research, other challenges to successful implementation of online research and comprehension instruction in the guided reading framework may stem from inadequate access to technology, limited technical support with devices, software incompatibility, and technical failures (Chou, Block, & Jesness, 2012; Rosen & Beck-Hill, 2012; Towndrow & Vallance, 2013). These school factors must be addressed prior to implementation to limit teacher frustration.

Another continuing challenge is providing inservice and preservice teachers with proper training and support. Both preservice teacher programs and professional in-service trainings focus on how to use programs or applications and offer ideas for integrating these programs or applications into lessons (Ertmer, Ottenbreit-Leftwich, Sadik, Sendurur, & Sendurur, 2012). However, educators are calling for professional learning experiences that guide them in integrating technology into their instruction, focusing on instructional approaches as opposed to programs, and extended time and support for their early attempts at technology integration

(Hutchison, 2012). Preservice teacher programs should work to integrate technology practices into existing courses and consider creating new courses that address new literacies, such as online research and comprehension.

Research must continue to inform educators of instructional practices that facilitate student learning of online research and comprehension skills. This study helps to inform the field on possible instructional approach that could be utilized to develop upper elementary students online research and comprehension skills. However, questions still remain. What is the impact of a guided reading context on students' online research and comprehension skills? To what extent do these skills transfer to students' individual research skills? One fact remains. In order to equip our students with the digital literacy skills they need to succeed in college and careers, teachers must incorporate instruction in online research and comprehension into daily lessons. The rewards to students are great as they learn the necessary skills to effectively find, evaluate, and communicate in global online environments.

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