

Struggle and success on the path to a positive reading identity: A collective case study of
seventh-grade readers in a rural school

by

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B.S., Kansas State University, 1997
M.S., Fort Hays State University, 2011
Ed.S., Fort Hays State University, 2017

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Curriculum and Instruction
College of Education

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Manhattan, Kansas

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Abstract

The more students read, the better they read, and students are more inclined to read when they are motivated to read. Students' interests and their confidence as readers contribute to their motivation. Confidence is impacted by how students view themselves as readers, an identity which can be influenced by the environment surrounding them. The purpose of this narrative exploration of a collective case study was to identify how rural middle school students perceived themselves as readers and what factors in and outside of school shaped those perceptions. Five seventh-grade students and seven teachers in a rural PreK-12 school participated in this 13-week study. Data were collected using interviews, classroom observations, and email exchanges. Analysis revealed (a) student participants had potential to see themselves as readers which required ongoing support in and outside of the school setting throughout middle school; (b) students experience positioning, struggling, and succeeding as they construct their reading identities; (c) positive elementary experiences, focus on intrinsic motivation, schoolwide support for reading, and maintaining rigor while providing instruction in foundational elements all benefit the construction of positive reading identities. A small, rural school environment can provide conditions that support positive reading identity construction among its middle school students; however, teacher turnover and threat of closure can eclipse the impact of those conditions. Findings have implications for teachers who facilitate students' reading identity construction. Implications for rural schools include meeting unique needs of middle school-aged students and connecting education to the community beyond the school walls.

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Approved by:

Major Professor
Dr. Lotta Larson

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memories of four educators who had a profound effect on me when I first moved to a small, rural community in West Central Kansas. Lavina Scheuerman was a former teacher who maintained a passion for working with children throughout her life. Erma Wood started her career at a one-room schoolhouse and eventually taught in the same building as Lavina. Erma, too, cared for the children of her rural community throughout her life. Ila Mae “Lilly” Edwards was not a teacher in the traditional sense of the word, but her love of learning and her care for the people in her small community impacted those around her. Dennis Elder was not a teacher by profession, but he loved teaching the local 4-H members about rocketry, and he was known to teach his customers what he knew about plumbing and air conditioning when they wanted to learn. He was a passionate mayor of his community, looking after the interest of all and engaging with anyone new. I remain ever grateful for their presence in my life and their impact on me.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Stories are powerful. In a new location, meeting new people, we use them to break the ice, to put others at ease. In school, all the facts and details we need to memorize hold together better in our memories in the form of a story. Sometimes, when we cannot remember the whole story, others with shared memories help tell the story with us. If you visit a small town, you will likely hear some good stories. Often, these have to do with the weather: the time the tornado touched down just past the sale barn on the night of an auction, the time a storm picked up apples in one yard and dumped them two blocks away, or the time a neighbor nearly got swept down the creek in his truck. Other stories reflect the close-knit community: how neighbors came together to bring in the wheat harvest after a tractor accident put a farmer in the hospital, how a community raised money with a hog feed to pay someone's medical bills, how a group of mothers knew their children were always within hollering distance playing at a house nearby. Everyone has stories.

Seeking fabric to make a unique quilt, Bonnie Neufeld (2019) turned to friends and estate sales. With each piece of fabric, people told her the story behind it. She collected fabrics of varying colors and textures, some far from those seen as desirable or typically used in quilting. Neufeld explained,

I challenged myself to resist matching and blending fabrics. Instead, I purposefully included jarring colors and textures and patterns, taking great delight in placing them side by side! Strips of sturdy double knit were placed next to delicate hankies; bits of embroidered tea towels and wall calendars from the 80's found their place alongside African cloth and feed sacks; tie-dyed rainbow fabric and gingham cross-stitch aprons settled in amidst bits of old blouses and flannel shirts. (n.p., 2019)

Neufeld assembled scraps into blocks, then cut blocks into wedges in order to shape them into the circle pattern her husband designed for her unique pieces, each with a unique story.

Quilting is not an unusual pastime in the rural Midwest. It reflects a resourcefulness needed where fabric stores are not just around the corner and where there are not a multitude of activities to keep people occupied during free time. Sometimes, a community gathers around a large frame to quilt together. Many quilts contain family memories and are passed down. In *The Keeping Quilt* (1988), storyteller Patricia Polacco told the story of a quilt made from her ancestors' clothes that was passed down through six generations and was used at important family events. The quilt also had an important role in Polacco's own growing up, in her bedtime routines and in her imaginative play. It is my hope that this dissertation serves as a kind of story quilt, bringing together the stories other researchers have told, stories I discovered in my own research, and my own stories.

My Story

I live in a rural Kansas town and have always found something special about the experience. I like the quiet, the occasional sounds of roosters or cattle on the edge of town, and the rumble of trucks pulling through the elevator during harvest season. Occasionally someone rides a horse through town. Bucket calves have taken rides in mini-vans to and from the community building for 4-H presentations. The county newspaper has reported on agriculture days and soil conservation poster winners at school and on an area teacher who competed for Miss United States Agriculture Queen. What may be most special about a rural community is the people: a beautician who kept the community informed of how nursing home residents were doing while in COVID-19 quarantine; a mayor, who was also a plumber, who helped neighbors and befriended anyone new to town; a retired school teacher who handed out pencils at

Halloween and visited with each trick-or-treater for at least five minutes before letting them go on to the next house; a librarian who was in tune with the needs of the community and provided a place for coffee and visiting and an opportunity for homework help and tutoring after school.

For a time the library in my community was a popular stopping place for children once the bus brought them seven miles back to town after a day of school and let them off down the street. The librarian saw this as an opportunity to round up volunteers, including that retired teacher and another who started her career in a one-room schoolhouse, to provide some extra help for students struggling with math or reading or just needing some academic enrichment. I was fortunate to work with the librarian, to learn about her concerns for children who may not conform to teachers' expectations but who still deserve opportunities to succeed in school, to see themselves as capable of succeeding. I was also fortunate to work with those retired teachers who cared so deeply for the rural community and everyone in it. It is this experience that largely shapes this study. Having worked in larger schools, I was interested in how the rural setting may impact students' experiences with reading and, thus, their reading identities. I have seen the potential in rural communities in one community that came together for the benefit of its children's education. I wanted to see what other potential existed.

The year my principal offered me an opportunity to teach Senior English, I left the high school for what I saw as a better opportunity in another building teaching middle school students. I watched my daughter navigate her way through middle school, and I recognize the pivotal role middle school can play as adolescents go through physical, cognitive, social, and emotional changes that can sometimes send them on a rollercoaster. These early adolescent years are also when children begin defining their own identities, figuring out who they are (Brown & Knowles,

2007). For this reason, I wanted to focus this study on the experiences of middle school-aged rural students in particular.

Background

Students who read for pleasure are more likely to succeed academically (Horbec, 2012), and it is widely believed that the more students read, the better they read (International Literacy Association [ILA], 2019). Additionally, students who read more are more likely to attend college and, thus, are more likely to have professional positions (University of Oxford, 2011). However, student motivation to read for pleasure often begins to drop significantly as early as third grade (Scholastic, 2019). By the time many students reach middle school, teachers may find their interest in reading appears to be nonexistent. This is especially concerning when we consider how much information students will be expected to glean from textbooks throughout their middle and high school experiences.

Adolescent motivation to read hinges on three key components: interest, dedication, and confidence (Guthrie et al., 2013). High school readers' confidence can be impacted by labels assigned to them by their school; students have been shown to flourish when teachers give them confidence or falter when teachers give them negative labels (Glenn et al., 2018; Learned, 2016). This confidence is directly tied to students' perceptions of themselves as readers and to their motivation to read. When students possess positive reading identities, they are likely to read more; when they do not possess positive reading identities, they read less (Locher et al., 2020).

Identifying the factors that impact middle school students' reading identities can allow educators and others to help students build strong reading identities for themselves before they enter high school where reading to gain information is essential for academic success (Gillis et al., 2017). Students' experiences are not homogeneous, though. People's identities are impacted

by the cultures in which they exist and with which they interact (Alvermann, 2001; Gee, 2000). This raises the question whether adolescents attending rural schools are impacted by different factors than adolescents in more urban settings as they establish their reading identities.

Nearly one in five students in the United States was enrolled in a rural school in the 2016-2017 school year (Showalter et al., 2019). Such a large number of students means examining the nature and needs of rural education is worthwhile, yet rural education research is limited (Miller & Thompson, 2016; Schafft & Biddle, 2014). Rural fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders outperformed their peers in town and urban settings in reading achievement on the 2015 National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) (NCES, 2015). The rural high school graduation rate is higher than the national average (Showalter, 2019). However, the gap in college completion is growing between those living in rural areas and those living in urban areas (United States Department of Agriculture [USDA], 2017). This gap may be reflective of rural students' not completing college or of their not returning to rural areas following their post-secondary education. It is reflective of the education levels in the communities in which rural schools are situated and an aspect of the rural culture that may have an influence on students' identities.

The nature of rural schools varies vastly across the United States. The economics and cultures of the areas in which rural schools are situated can vary (Schafft & Biddle, 2014) as much as the sizes of the schools and the communities they serve. Some schools are located within small towns of a few thousand, others may be linking several small communities of only a few hundred each, while others are in remote locations some distance from any local town (Showalter et al., 2019). These schools vary in size, with some on the edge of larger cities having large numbers while remote schools may serve very few students. The size often impacts the

grade levels a school serves, causing middle school to look very different across rural settings as well (Miller & Thompson, 2016). Among the possible configuration of grade levels, young adolescents may attend school in a building housing kindergarten through eighth grades, kindergarten through twelfth grades, grades seven through twelve, or grades six through eight. Regardless of the grades served in the building, rural schools play significant roles in their communities as employers and centers of social activity (Gallo, 2020).

Although a rural school can play a significant role in its community and a fifth of students in the United States attend a rural school (Showalter et al., 2019), rural schools remain understudied, often because of the distance between schools and the small population density that makes finding an effective sample size for experimental research difficult (Sheridan et al., 2017). Biddle and Azano (2016) pointed out that schools are situated in specific places which are impacted by factors that in turn impact schooling in those places. In rural schools, those factors that may have a negative impact on student achievement due to place include long bus rides to and from school and extra-curricular activities, difficulty retaining highly qualified teachers, and lack of access to quality professional development. At the same time, place can have a positive impact when considering innovation, supportive communities, and a sense of family often experienced in rural schools (Gallo, 2020; Lavalley, 2018). Understanding nuances impacting rural schools and, more specifically, rural middle school students' experiences establishing their reading identities can better equip teachers to provide support to this population. Additionally, because of the close-knit nature of rural communities, understanding the role the rural context plays in middle school students' constructing their reading identities may allow administrators and community members to also provide appropriate support to students.

The Problem

Many researchers have examined the influence of instruction on student reading identities (Francois, 2013; Frankel, 2016; Glenn et al., 2018; Learned, 2016; Meier, 2015; Quinlan & Curtin, 2017). However, this research is not often conducted in rural settings (Meier, 2015; Quinlan & Curtin, 2017). While rural readers' preferences may be similar to their sub-urban and urban counterparts (Quinlan & Curtin, 2017), students' perceptions of their reading abilities can be context dependent (Louick et al., 2016), and a rural school context may have the power to influence those perceptions and identities. Though rural students drop out of school at a rate lower than urban students, the rate is higher than that of suburban students (Provasnik et al., 2007). If students' ability to position themselves positively in class can impact engagement and academic success (Frankel, 2016), fully understanding rural middle school students' attitudes toward reading and how they may perceive of themselves as readers may help equip rural teachers and other stakeholders to support students' positive reading identities and encourage more reading.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this research was to investigate the experiences that middle school students attending a rural Kansas school had reading and engaging with text both in and outside of school to understand the influence of the rural setting on the construction of their reading identities. This study sought to examine how students perceived themselves as readers and what factors in their lives shaped these perceptions. This research sought to answer the following overarching research question and sub-questions:

Overarching Question

How does a rural setting influence middle school students' reading identity construction?

Sub-questions

1. How do middle school students in a rural Kansas school describe themselves as readers?
2. How do middle school students in a rural Kansas school experience constructing their reading identities in and outside of the school setting?
3. What role does the educational environment play in shaping rural Kansas middle school students' reading identities?

Theoretical Underpinnings

This study examines rural middle school students' experiences through the lenses of sociocultural theory on literacy (Moll, 1992) and identity theory (Alvermann, 2001; Gee, 2000). Moll (1992) believed that "properly used, social and cultural practices can serve as powerful resources for the children's schooling, especially for the development of literacy" (p. 212). Drawing from the work of Vygotsky (1978), Moll examined the impact of social relationships and students' interactions with various elements in their environment on their learning, finding that "schooling, as a sociocultural process, mediates students' academic experiences and outcomes, including what literacy means to them" (1992, pp. 213-214). Outlining a theory of identity, Gee (1990) found that interactions and socializations allow children to develop perceptions of themselves, their identities. Those identities are continuously being constructed, both by the individual and by others' perceptions of the individual (Bartlett, 2005) both in and outside of the school setting. Gee (2000) contended that individuals' identities, either "assigned" by an institution or "self-made," are affirmed by the way others respond to them in varying

contexts. Alvermann (2001) identified that students adopt various reading identities, and that these can be constructed by the adolescents themselves or with the influence of others.

Institutions like schools and the people within them can disadvantage children by assigning or perpetuating harmful identities, like that of the struggling reader, or can help students position themselves to have access to discourses associated with power (Gee, 1990).

Research Design

To best understand rural middle school students' experiences constructing their reading identities, I used narrative inquiry to explore a collective case study. In much the same way as each piece of fabric in Neufeld's (2019) quilt represented a different individual's story, narrative inquiry allowed me to focus on each individual student's story of their experiences during my own research. Narrative inquiry moves an experience from being merely an experience to being something with meaning. Kramp (2004) explained, "narrative enables the storyteller to organize the story told by linking events, perceptions, and experiences" (p. 107). Collective case study (Stake, 1995), then, allowed me to link and compare the stories to give them additional structure which allowed me to reach new understandings, similar to the way in which Neufeld assembled the pieces with their separate stories into a new, original design. Sonday, et al. (2020) explained how narrative inquiry can help shape understanding within case study research, especially when case study alone does not provide the meaning behind the events the participants experience. The structure of narrative inquiry supported my case study research in providing additional clarity in the boundaries of the case. The contexts of place and time were important elements within each case, and story structure naturally added to the boundedness of these elements in identifying setting which included both place and time. A narrative exploration of collective case study methodology allowed me to help share rural middle school students' stories in a way that may

help educators and other stakeholders identify methods to provide them positive supports in constructing positive reading identities.

My research spanned a period of 13 weeks at the research site and followed the timeline outlined in Appendix C. Five seventh-grade students attending a rural Kansas public school housing grades pre-kindergarten through 12 (PreK-12) and seven of their teachers participated in the study. After I presented the research project to the students, five of them volunteered and secured parental consent to participate. Their teachers confirmed this was a diverse group with differing interests, backgrounds, and abilities that would allow me opportunity to deepen my understanding of middle school reading experiences (Stake, 1995). I interviewed students and teachers one to three times each and recorded interviews when given permission to do so. Because an observation “provides here-and-now experience in depth” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 273), I also observed the student participants within the school setting in various locations throughout the research period. The locations included the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom and other content area classrooms in order to determine what experiences students had with reading in these varied settings. These observations allowed me to see what the student participants experienced as they navigated constructing reading identities in the school setting. I took detailed field notes and kept a reflection journal. Additional data sources included email exchanges with teachers and newspaper articles. All of these sources were used for analysis.

Significance of the Study

In a rural community, the institution of the public school is often tied closely to a community’s social cohesion (Berry & West, 2010; Villa & Knutas, 2020). It becomes a center for older residents to impart culture on younger residents and to celebrate their accomplishments by attending athletic and other school-centered events. Some believe that small schools can

instill in their students a stronger sense of belonging (Berry & West, 2010), possibly a result of these tight social connections between the larger community and the school community, both of which students exist and construct their identities in.

How literacy is understood in rural communities among children and their elders, and how that interacts with understandings of literacy promoted in school settings, even in a rural environment are not well known. Villa and Knutas (2020) found that rural culture can be used to help students connect understandings to the information learned from textbooks. However, they identified that there can be a conflict between these rural experiences, understandings, and identities and the “dominating educational discourses” (Villa & Knutas, 2020, p. 2) that occur in published curricula. These “dominating educational discourses” are also promoted through various agencies including state and national government which makes decisions about all aspects of rural education including assessment. Additionally, schools preparing teachers to teach in all settings including rural areas are also influenced by “dominating educational discourses” promoted through governmental agencies.

There is limited research focused specifically on rural middle-level education (Miller & Thompson, 2018). This study adds to the limited research in this area and sheds light on the intersectionality of rural student reading identities as they are impacted by both the circumstances of the rural setting and the educational setting. Understanding these impacts can help rural educators and other stakeholders better meet rural middle school students’ needs and support students’ construction of their own reading identities in order to help students be successful in multiple discourses they navigate.

Delimitations

The proposed study was delimited to include only students who were in the seventh grade attending a rural Kansas public school housing grades PreK-12. The study was conducted over a 13-week period during one school year. For the purpose of observation, the study was further delimited to those students who attended regular education English, Social Studies, and Science classes in the school. Because the nature of rural schools varies across the United States (Showalter et al., 2019), participants and their experiences were not representative of all middle school students. Their experiences, especially those where commonalities were found, still provide insight into the potentially unique, different needs among rural, suburban, and urban adolescents as they construct their reading identities.

Limitations

Delimiting the study to students of middle school age attending a single rural school in the state of Kansas limited the transferability of findings to students of other age levels attending schools in other areas. By its nature, qualitative research is subjective, placing a limit on its effectiveness; however, with triangulation and validation of observations, the limits were mitigated (Stake, 1995). One limitation of using case study, in particular, was that an individual participant was not necessarily representative of the larger population (Saldaña, 2011). In this case, students selected from one rural Kansas school were likely not even fully representative of all rural Kansas students. Additionally, the use of participant interviews assumed participants would be accurate and honest in their responses, which could not be guaranteed. Kim (2016) pointed out that in telling their stories, participants in narrative inquiry are constructing the story and determining what pieces to share or omit. Researcher bias can also be a more significant problem in qualitative research than in experimental research (Yin, 2014). Participants in the

study were those who chose to participate and whose parents approved of their participation. Likewise, participants were limited to the population of the seventh-grade class of one rural school which was limited in its diversity. These factors limited diversity in the pool of participants and transferability of findings to diverse populations. I also observed students in their educational settings only when their teachers were most comfortable with my being present. This opportunity to elect to participate may have limited the view I had of a variety of experiences students encountered in their rural educational setting.

Operational Definition of Terms

1. *Rural*: That which falls within the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) definitions of rural fringe, rural distant, and rural remote. Census-defined rural territories outside of urbanized or urban cluster areas (Miller & Thompson, 2016).
2. *Middle school students*: Young adolescents aged 10 to 15 in grades five through eight who may attend various configurations of school like a junior high, middle school, K-8 school or other (Mertens et al., 2016).
3. *Reading identity*: How students perceive themselves as readers, whether self-made or assigned. These identities can include struggling reader, at-risk reader, avid reader, or reluctant reader, among many others (Alvermann, 2001).
4. *Positioning*: The “processes by which rights and duties are assigned, ascribed, or appropriated and resisted, rejected, or repudiated” (Harré, 2012, p. 196).

Chapter Review

Construction of positive reading identities may help middle school students be academically successful. Knowing factors that contribute to or detract from positive reading identity development in rural areas can help teachers, administrators, and community members

position rural middle school students to be successful. To understand reading identity construction in rural middle school students, I utilized narrative inquiry to explore a collective case study. This method allowed me to hear and analyze students' individual stories of their experiences and examine them together for information stakeholders can use to support students' positive reading identity construction in the future.

Organization of the Study

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One introduced the background of the study and presented the problem, research purpose and questions, theoretical underpinnings, research design, study significance, delimitations and limitations, and definition of terms. Chapter Two presents a literature review of the theory behind and research into identity construction and reading identities, the roles of motivation and positioning, the rural context, and place consciousness and place-based education. Chapter Three presents the research methodology including a subjectivity statement, explorations of narrative inquiry and case study, discussion of other methods of inquiry, and the research design. Chapter Four presents the findings. Chapter Five presents conclusions drawn from the findings, alignment to the theoretical framework, implications for stakeholders in rural education, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences that middle school students attending a rural Kansas school had reading and engaging with texts both in and outside of the school setting to understand the influence of the rural setting on the construction of their reading identities. This chapter explores theory and research related to sociocultural literacy theory, reader identity construction, and positioning; factors that contribute to positive reading identities; teacher roles in reading identity construction; and the role of the rural context.

Sociocultural Literacy Theory

Sociocultural literacy theory evolved out of Vygotsky's ideas of social constructivism. Vygotsky believed that children act and develop in relationship to their environment, the culture, people, and objects that surround them (1998). Moll (1992) built on this idea. Recognizing that the households from which students come and in which they develop can possess extensive knowledge and skills, even when parents have minimal education, Moll developed the term "funds of knowledge" to name both the information and the social networks through which information is exchanged within and among households. Often knowledge is gained informally, as household members may not have time or money to pursue formal education. Members of different households exchange knowledge and teach one another new skills. These are passed on within the individual household. Families and communities thus serve as "valuable educational resources" (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p. 35). Moll (1992) noted that literacy plays a role, though supplementary, as "it is used to build on and extend existing funds of knowledge" (p. 223). Moll later developed this idea further to define "funds of identity" (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p. 33). Because "identity is embedded in culture and vice versa" (p. 36), Esteban-Guitart and Moll asserted that people construct their own identities out of the social structures,

culture, and cultural artifacts that surround them and with which they interact each day. Thus, lived experience is a significant factor in identity construction.

Identity Construction

Identity construction may be most significant in adolescence. Vygotsky (1998) explained that adolescents are “historical and social” beings whose interests develop within the social community in which they are maturing and that these interests cannot be forced on adolescents but rather must develop out of the process of maturation of the adolescents and their tendencies, “carrying them to a higher level and converting them into human interests, and themselves become internal component factors in the personality” (p. 23). Adolescence can be a tumultuous time. Students of middle school age navigate many changes in their lives, physiological and otherwise. Many students transition out of elementary school into a new setting with more expectations and responsibilities. With these responsibilities and through their interactions with others, these students begin to etch out who they are (Moll, 2013). Identities allow adolescents to navigate relationships and identify others with whom they share commonalities (Gee, 1990). These identities are shaped by both how the adolescents perceive themselves and how others perceive them (Gee, 2000). Hammack (2014) asserted that while identity allows people to find connectedness to the world around them, it also serves to divide that world into categories. In the English Language Arts (ELA) classroom, that divide may occur among reading identities which become separated into many categories, notably those of readers and non-readers.

Reading Identities

In the ELA classroom, reading identities may relate to genre preferences, such as graphic novel enthusiasts or mystery lovers, or to reading abilities, such as struggling or slow readers or avid readers; some students assume multiple identities (Alvermann, 2001). Teachers often

administer reader interest inventories (Atwell, 1987; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Miller & Kelly, 2013) to identify and potentially capitalize on student interests when assigning readings and connecting students with books. Additionally, surveys that help teachers identify students' motivations to read (Malloy et al., 2017; Pitcher et al., 2007; Watkins & Browning, 2015) allow teachers insight into whether students perceive themselves as readers and where students perceive their own strengths being situated. Teachers can use information like this to help facilitate more positive reading experiences for students and potentially provide interventions of targeted skill-building activities that could help students experience greater success as readers (Malloy et al., 2017), which could lead to more positive perceptions of themselves as readers.

Role of Motivation

Reading motivation is “the drive to read resulting from a comprehensive set of an individual’s beliefs about, attitudes toward, and goals for reading” (Conradi et al., 2014, p. 154). When students are motivated to read, they are more likely to comprehend what they are reading; student interest in a topic positively affects students’ cognitive engagement (Guthrie et al., 2007). Habitual reading motivation, the inclination of someone to almost always be ready to read, is comprised of multiple constructs including reading attitude, reading-related task value benefits, and reading self-concept and self-efficacy (Schiefele et al., 2012). When teens feel positively about the activity of reading, see value in the act of reading, and have confidence in their own abilities to read, they are more inclined to be motivated to read. These constructs influence one another as teens navigate reading activities in and outside of school (Boerma et al., 2016; Cantrell et al., 2018; Swalander & Taube, 2007).

Feeling Positive about Reading

Enjoyment of and positive experiences with reading are likely to impact students' inclination to identify themselves as readers. Opportunity for discussing reading can lead to greater reading enjoyment among students (Pittman & Honchell, 2014) and can create more equitable situations in which each student can contribute meaningfully (Boardman et al., 2015). These social interactions over reading can lead to greater motivation to read (Bozack & Salvaggio, 2013) and to increased comprehension (Pittman & Honchell, 2014). While students may be extrinsically motivated by the opportunity to interact with peers, increased comprehension may spur greater intrinsic motivation because students can see their success in reading.

Having Confidence When Reading

Self-efficacy plays an important role in students' success, as it is the belief that they have in their own capability to accomplish what they desire (Bandura, 2001). A sense of self-efficacy gives students a sense of confidence when participating in academic tasks. Boerma et al. (2016) found self-concept significantly predicted reading attitude in fifth and sixth graders. Cantrell et al. (2018) found that when rural middle school boys had a greater expectation of being successful in reading, they were inclined to read more; however, this was not the case with girls, reinforcing the fact that different students have differing needs. There is some uncertainty regarding the impact self-efficacy has on student achievement. Louick et al. (2016), studying 112 struggling middle school students in grades six through eight, found that while self-efficacy correlated with reading comprehension, it did not predict growth in reading ability.

Early intervention to help struggling readers find success in meaningful ways to establish positive self-concepts as readers has been found to have greater impacts as readers age.

Superreguy et al. (2018) found that students' self-concept of reading ability in middle childhood predicted their reading achievement later in their education, even when controlling for early reading achievement and other confounding variables. While Louick et al. (2016) looked at more immediate results, the findings of Superreguy et al (2018) indicated that helping students establish a strong self-concept of reading early is a valuable contributor to later success. Students who see themselves as readers are more inclined to have a strong self-concept leading to more positive reading attitudes and more motivation to read.

One key contributor to students' positive reading identities and self-concept is their ability to read. Students who experience early success in reading are more likely to experience success when they reach high school (Sparks et al., 2014), and this success can lead to students perceiving themselves as readers. Sparks et al. (2014) found that these students are also more likely to have greater print exposure in upper grades; they are more likely to read more and have more opportunities to read. While this indicates the importance of supporting students' early success, not all students have that opportunity. When struggling readers reach middle school and high school, additional supports are needed to bolster self-confidence. However, as researchers have found, older students may react negatively to school-assigned labels and may prefer to not be isolated for remediation during the school day (Bursuck et al., 2010; Learned et al., 2017)

Seeing Value in Reading

Instruction that supports students in making connections to their experiences has been shown to be beneficial to students' motivation to read and sense of self-efficacy as readers (Butz & Usher, 2015). Surveying 2,511 fourth through eighth graders, Butz and Usher (2015) found that students were concerned with texts that were relevant to their lives. When that relevance is not present, students may experience a lack of enjoyment in learning and be less motivated to

read (Quinlan & Curtin, 2017). When discussions prompt students to make connections, students experience an increase in comprehension (Pittman & Honchell, 2014). Teachers can increase relevancy of students' out-of-school literacy engagement by supporting students' making connections between those texts and other traditional in-school texts, adding relevancy to the traditional texts while increasing comprehension and understandings developed regarding both types of texts (Del Nero, 2019a & 2019b). Fignon (2012) found that students respond positively to teachers' valuing their opinions of what they like in non-academic texts, further increasing their engagement with these texts and opening a pathway to connect students to other texts.

The Role of Positioning

Positions are established out of a common understanding of roles and responsibilities among a group in society. Harré et al. (2009) explained that positions can be acquired or seized and at other times assigned. For Gee (2000), the role of student was an identity assigned by the institution of the school. Students may also find the school assigning their reading identity, positioning students in a positive or potentially negative way. Often those within the institution are inclined to look for a bell curve, which means that for some students to be seen as above average others will be seen as average while yet others will be given stigmatizing labels (e.g., at-risk, struggling, disabled) for being below average (Brantlinger, 2006). Individuals may choose the degree to which they live into the identities ascribed to them by institutions or others (Gee, 2000; Harré et al., 2009). However, institutional identities are often well supported by the language of school personnel, making it difficult or even impossible for students to shed an unwanted label. Harré et al. (2009) explained that some may have a "footing" which allows them to be listened to and have their repositioning of themselves considered (p. 21). When students are labeled by a school or teacher as a "struggling reader" in some way, they often must find ways to

position themselves differently in the eyes of their teachers and peers. Attaining the necessary “footing” to push back against institutionally assigned labels is challenging in the hierarchical structure of the school.

Glenn et al. (2018) followed five high school students, juniors and seniors, who had been identified by their school as struggling readers. The teens received this institutional identity because they were enrolled in low-track or remedial English classes, had done poorly on the state assessment, or had failing grades. Through enrollment in a Young Adult Literature (YAL) course in which students were given choice and agency as readers, students were able to position themselves as readers and engage in discussion with others about what they were reading. They shared with the researchers resilient reading habits they held outside of school that included reading at home or around friends in the community where this was not an interest shared by others. While the students could exert their reading identities in these environments, they could not position themselves as readers in their remedial or low-track English classes in school. Deadlines, lack of choice, and other limits to student agency prevented these students from perceiving themselves as readers in school outside of the YAL classroom.

Observing two high school students, Frankel (2016) noted that one, a white female positioned as a struggling reader through placement in a course for students who had performed poorly on a standardized reading test, acquiesced to her teacher’s ideas of a good reader. This acquiescence allowed her to assume a more positive position in the class as a reader. On the other hand, a black male was unable to position himself as a reader in a separate class, also designed for students who experienced reading difficulties, because his concept of being a reader conflicted with his teacher’s expectations. Both students in Frankel’s study actively worked to reposition themselves as readers, but only one succeeded in changing how others perceived her.

Many students meet with teacher criticism when they push back against teacher- or institution-assigned identities and expectations as the black male did in Frankel's (2016) study. Interviewing and observing eight middle school girls in a rural school, Seaton (2007b) found that teachers' prejudgments as well as gendered expectations limited her participants' abilities to establish their own identities as girls and as students. As a result of teacher attitudes and behaviors, the girls felt they were not listened to and even ignored. This action denied the girls the opportunity to exert their own positions in the classroom in a positive way (Harré et al., 2009). Seaton concluded that teachers have power through relationships with students to allow students to explore their identities and position themselves positively (2007b).

Some students can position themselves positively in one class while struggling to escape negative positioning in another. Learned (2016) noted Evan, a 14-year-old high school male, viewed himself as a poor mathematics student and viewed others in his low-track class as more capable of learning and thus, in his words, "more eligible to matter" to the teacher and others (p. 671). However, in reading he positioned himself as a reader and an engaged learner through his participation in class. This was not the result of more knowledge about the subject but because of a teacher who investigated Evan's behaviors and provided support upon discovering he was homeless and hungry. Learned found with other students in her study that teacher reactions to students when students experienced various forms of strain either negatively or positively impacted students' abilities to position themselves as successful students.

Teachers often view students as less engaged and less motivated than students see themselves, because teachers tend to connect motivation with academic performance (Neugebauer, 2016). However, students' self-identification as motivated does not necessarily correlate with their performance on high-stakes tests (Troyer, 2017) from which teachers may be

inclined to gauge motivation. Instead, allowing students to assess their own motivation to read can give teachers a more reliable picture of self-efficacy, motivation, and the value students place on reading than academic assessments (Malloy et al., 2017). However, Guthrie et al. (2007) found that there can be discrepancies between what students reveal about their sense of self-efficacy in self-report surveys as opposed to interviews. The authors proposed that this discrepancy in their study could have been due to their fourth-grade participants' equating self-efficacy with skills at the word and sentence levels and not with broader reading comprehension skills. Older readers may be more inclined to associate self-efficacy with these broader skills, revealing the complexities of readers and readers' identities.

While teachers and schools are inclined to make judgments about and label students, Ivey (1999) found that middle school readers may not be well suited to narrow labels because the reading identities of these students may be more complex than previous research had indicated. Early (1984, as cited in Ivey) classified middle school readers three ways according to their ability to decode and read fluently and the impact of those skills on their willingness to and interest in reading. Ivey, however, discovered this was too limiting for the varied characteristics teachers could expect to see in middle school readers. Following three sixth-grade students, Ivey (1999) found that middle school readers are complex, may demonstrate strong opinions about reading-related instruction and texts, may demonstrate engagement and exercise comprehension strategies when listening to texts being read aloud, may demonstrate varied levels of utilizing strategies, and will likely demonstrate continued growth.

Negative Positioning

As demonstrated above, the institution of the school, in the form of its teachers, administrators, and systems, plays a significant role in shaping students' reading identities for

better or worse. As early as elementary school the label of “struggling reader” that teachers assign students can have negative impacts on the students’ performance in class, on the view other teachers take of them, and consequently on the way students are treated (Triplett, 2007). For Evan in Learned’s (2016) study, a math teacher’s assumption that apathy was the cause of Evan’s difficulty attending school regularly resulted in the teacher either not addressing Evan during instruction or only asking Evan for his homework. Such interactions positioned Evan negatively and caused him to adopt a deficit perspective of himself.

Parents are often aware of the negative experiences their children are having in school. Griffin and Galassi (2010) identified themes of barriers students face to academic success after interviewing parents of middle school students. The parents pointed to teacher preconceptions and negative interactions between students and teachers, like a teacher ignoring a student, as some of the struggles students faced. These acts of negative positioning are both explicit and implicit. They can be clear and obvious to the actor and receiver, or they can be unintended and less evident. Acts of negative positioning can have an immediate impact on students, or the impact can be the gradual result of many actions over time. Coming from representatives of the institution of the school, these barriers position teens negatively and make it difficult for them to position themselves positively as capable students. Bursuck et al. (2010) found that these struggles for students continued as they moved into high school where little reading support existed in content-area classes that were heavily dependent on reading. Students who struggle with reading through middle school may not receive any additional support upon reaching high school and will continue to be negatively positioned as struggling readers who will find it frustrating to keep up.

Positive Positioning

Teachers have the capability to impact student attitudes toward themselves and reading. A variety of activities can lead to improved reader identities including choice in and access to reading materials, independent reading time during the school day, and opportunities to discuss readings with peers (Boardman et al., 2015; Guthrie et al., 2007; Neugebauer, 2016; Pittman & Honchell, 2014). Additionally, relationships teachers build with students in getting to know them and their interests can also have a positive impact on how students perceive themselves as readers (Francois, 2013; Learned, 2016). Students and their parents have voiced a desire for these relationships; students want to be seen as mattering, want their concerns and ideas to be heard and recognized (Griffin & Galassi, 2010; Learned, 2016; Seaton, 2017b).

Ivey (1999) found that providing effective literacy instruction that meets the needs of a range of complex reading identities in middle school requires giving students choice of a wide range of reading materials, ensuring students have a purpose for reading, and individualizing instruction to meet specific student needs. Teachers understand that students are unique and have unique needs; this is especially the case in regard to reading. Teachers cannot make assumptions about these individual needs, but instead need to get to know their students whose reading needs may be more complex than expected (Del Nero, 2019a; Greenberg et al., 2006; Louick et al., 2016; Sandretto & Tilson, 2016; Troyer, 2017). By tapping into their students' interests and specific reading needs and providing choice in reading materials and assignments, teachers can help facilitate students' making more connections to their own experiences and interests both of which contributes to stronger reader identities. Meier (2015) was able to support students in improving their views of themselves as readers through an increase in opportunities for independent reading of choice selections during the school day. Meier's students indicated

choice was directly related to their enjoyment of reading. While 10 of 19 students in Meier's class viewed themselves as readers at the beginning of her study, 18 of 19 viewed themselves as readers in the end as a result of having had the opportunity to choose texts to which they could make personal connections.

Choice also affords students a sense of agency in their learning by providing them with a level of autonomy and by allowing them to better identify reading materials for which they have a reading purpose. Having a reading purpose will, in turn, foster greater motivation and engagement (Guthrie et al., 2007). Stronge et al. (2011) found that among the qualities of successful teachers is the ability to facilitate student responsibility. When teachers allow choice in reading materials, they are allowing students to take responsibility for an aspect of their learning. This autonomy support can lead to greater intrinsic reading motivation in students (De Naeghel et al., 2014). Increased support for student agency has led to an improvement in students' sense of self efficacy, in part because it sends a message that students belong in the classroom (Butz & Usher, 2015; Francois, 2013).

To facilitate sufficient choice and for students to be able to consider themselves readers, access to reading materials must be provided. While some may assume that school and public libraries are enough to provide that access, libraries may not always be the preferred source of reading material for teens; home and retail outlets may be more popular sources (Becnel & Moeller, 2015). Merga (2019) found students, though interested in reading books, do not always show an inclination for going to the school library, meaning teachers, librarians, and others may have to be more creative with getting books in children's hands. Taking time to connect with students and develop an understanding of their interests and reading preferences can make it

easier for teachers and others to connect students with books that will engage them in reading (Francois, 2013; Merga, 2019; Miller & Kelly, 2014).

Instruction design plays a significant role in positioning students in such a way that they can grow as readers. Beyond providing choice, when teachers explicitly design instruction to connect new learning to students' current knowledge and experiences students gain a sense of self-efficacy that bolsters learning. Adding discussion opportunities allows students to demonstrate their knowledge in authentic, meaningful ways. Kim et al. (2017), studying students in grades six through eight, found that struggling readers were more likely to experience growth in literacy skills as a result of their improved confidence when they were engaged with a curriculum designed to connect reading with their experiences and to provide frequent opportunities for students to discuss their thoughts and opinions,

A common middle school reading instruction structure that positions students as readers by providing opportunities for students to discuss texts they have chosen to read independently is reading workshop (Atwell, 1987). Teachers using this structure often present choices to book clubs, allowing students to read and discuss a wide range of books together and keep journals throughout the process. This approach is beneficial to motivating students to read, engaging them in the reading process, and developing their positive identities as readers; however, additional instruction and guidance are necessary beyond just giving choices for reading. Dressel (2005) discovered that for students to gain from encountering alternate views of the world when choosing among multicultural literature selections, teachers must help students examine their assumptions about others and about systems that impact the struggles others face. Teachers cannot assume students of any grade level will have the tools necessary to engage in this kind of critical thinking on their own. Critical thinking can help students with other aspects of their

identity development. As students read, Schachter and Galili-Schachter (2012) propose readers can become proficient at engaging with texts to the degree that they can analyze what elements they wish to adopt as part of their own understandings of who they are, what they value, and what they believe. Sometimes students subconsciously adopt ideas into their own understandings and identities as a result of exposure (Gee, 1998); however, Schachter and Galili-Schachter propose teachers explicitly guide students in developing an understanding of how to create “self-relevant meanings in relation to, and with the help of, the text” (p. 30) as they consider a wide variety of perspectives and experiences and move beyond their own context. Stairs and Burgos (2010) discovered that eighth grade students may be ready for such instruction. Their analysis of students’ writings about favorite books reveals that these books have often led to students having altered views of themselves and resulted in personal decision making.

Developing positive relationships with their students allows teachers to understand the complex nature of their readers and to identify students’ interests and needs to better facilitate connecting them with texts and supporting them in reading those texts. In addition to facilitating student agency, Stronge et al. (2011) found that among the qualities of successful teachers, those teachers whose students make greater academic gains, is establishing positive relationships with students. Through positive relationships, teachers can communicate with students that their ideas are valued, positioning students for greater success. Learned (2016) pointed out,

In contexts where a student’s voice is only as valuable as his ability to know the “right” answer or be a “good” student, struggling readers are not only stifled academically but also discouraged from participating as valued members of classroom communities.” (p. 671)

Students are, in effect, denied an opportunity to view themselves in a positive light and establish a positive identity as a reader or as a student. However, when students feel valued and believe they have an authentic audience for discussing their ideas, they are more engaged in their reading, find greater enjoyment in their reading, and are more motivated to read (Falter Thomas, 2014; Fingon, 2012). Relationships with students can also allow teachers to identify ways to make meaningful connections with students' lives outside of school. Many middle school students express a lack of enjoyment in learning when they view the reading curriculum as disconnected from their daily lives (Quinlan & Curtin, 2017). When they are able to make connections to their experiences, however, teens are more likely to better comprehend the texts they read (Neugebauer, 2016), leading to a greater sense of self-efficacy and a more positive reading identity.

The Rural Context

For rural teens, the places in which they are growing up and the resources and unique experiences these places provide influence multiple aspects of their lives. For teachers to effectively connect reading instruction with these students' experiences, it is necessary to know what these experiences are. However, the experiences of rural teens in particular are not often a specific research focus (Miller & Thompson, 2018). It may be that rural teens share many similar reading experiences and perspectives with their urban counterparts (Becnel & Moeller, 2015). Concerns that parents have with rural schools, like a lack of effort to support struggling readers and provide meaningful interventions at the high school level that help and do not stigmatize teens (Bursuck et al., 2010), may not be unique to rural schools. The challenges, however, may be exacerbated by the nature of the rural locale (Azano et al., 2020). Additionally, the solutions

that rural schools identify to best meet the needs of their students may be unique because of their very location.

Rural experiences vary greatly across the United States. In some areas, rural schools may be small buildings that house all grades pre-kindergarten through twelfth; in other areas, they may be large buildings housing many students on the outskirts of a metropolitan area (Showalter et al., 2019). Some states are seeing an influx of immigrants into once homogeneous white rural communities. In other states, rural communities have been comprised of mostly non-white residents for many years. While the potential for diversity exists, white students make up 71% of the rural elementary school population (Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017), and 89% of teachers in rural schools are white (Geiger, 2018).

The 2020 census revealed people continue to leave rural areas of Kansas and migrate to larger, metropolitan areas with some rural counties losing over 15% of their population in the last 10 years (Hannah & Field, 2021). Education can play a conflicting role in rural communities. Teachers and parents who hold and communicate expectations for their students to attain an education beyond high school generate aspirations in their students to attain that post-high school education (Byun et al., 2012; Howley & Hambrick, 2014) which is often attained outside the community. Students, with higher education aspirations often expect to be living outside of their home communities after attaining a post-secondary education (Byun et al., 2012). Indeed, many of those leaving rural areas are young people who move away for college and stay in more densely populated areas for employment opportunities as opportunities in rural areas become scarce.

The 2020 census also revealed that Kansas is becoming more diverse (Hannah & Field, 2021), but despite the potential for diversity in rural contexts, people from non-rural

communities make broad generalizations and create narrow stereotypes to represent this diverse population. This can lead some educators to form assumptions about rural places and the people, especially students and parents, who live within them (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Connors, 2016; Grimes et al., 2013). Such assumptions can prevent educators from developing relationships with students that will allow them to make meaningful curricular decisions to best meet students' needs. Additionally, negative assumptions can prevent educators from leveraging the resources of the rural community to create positive connections for students between their in-school and out-of-school lives. Students with negative school experiences in which they perceive adults in school as treating students "unfairly and inequitably" are more likely to want to leave their communities following high school (Howley & Hambrick, 2014, p. 204). For shrinking communities wanting to maintain and grow their populations, having faculty devoted to providing equitable education can be paramount. While rural community leaders may be resigned to the fact that most children will want to leave and accept that schools should prepare them for living elsewhere (Budge, 2010), this attitude does not have to prevail and may conflict with what many students want (Howley & Hambrick, 2014).

Rural communities are often tightly connected to their rural schools (Gallo, 2020; Grimes et al., 2013). Community members understand the value of the school, which is often the biggest employer in the area and plays a significant role in developing citizens who will continue to play roles in the community after graduation; therefore, they often want to be involved in rural students' education (Gallo, 2020). Rural parents likely do not differ from parents elsewhere in their desire for their children to have a good education (Bursuck et al., 2010; Griffin & Galassi, 2010). This interest in rural children's education can have a positive impact on students when teachers are aware of the role place plays.

Place Consciousness

When schooling is abstracted from the local community and where and how local residents are making their livings, education becomes an institution that promotes leaving and often devalues the local place, local knowledge, and elements that would otherwise cause people to want to stay (Corbett, 2004). Educational leaders in rural areas are possibly best positioned to shape the instruction rural teachers provide to their students. They can situate the education of each individual within a greater goal of serving the community (Budge, 2010). Budge emphasizes that educational leaders are shaped by the place they are in, that it “influences [their] worldview and provides a context for action” (p. 17). Likewise, place shapes the identity of students.

Place-Based Education

Gruenewald and Smith (2008) equate place-conscious education with place-based education, explaining place-based education as “a community-based effort to reconnect the process of education, enculturation, and human development to the well-being of community life” (p. xvi). This “reconnection” happens through a process of helping children understand the inter-relatedness of the people and things within their communities (Anderson, 2017). By first developing these understandings at the local level, place-based educational practices can tap into students’ prior knowledge (Nichols et al., 2016). This strengths-based approach demonstrates for students a value for their own background knowledge and experiences that they bring to the classroom and their learning. Including students in the learning experience through this connection to background knowledge is culturally responsive (Anderson, 2017) and encourages greater engagement with content, because connecting to students’ background knowledge

connects “school to the world in personal, cultural, and contextual ways” (Nichols et al., 2016, p. 29).

Education that is place-based can help students make meaningful connections between where they live and the content they learn in school. Nichols et al. (2016) detailed several varied place-based projects with students ranging from pre-school-aged to university teacher education candidates. The authors described pre-schoolers connecting with place by taking a walk in their neighborhood and asking questions which led to investigations of the structure, design, composition, and location of bridges in their community. Teachers can foster additional connection-making by utilizing place-based education practices to integrate different subject areas (Nichols et al., 2016). For example, research into local water quality can tie together science, social studies, math, writing, and more, allowing students to practice skills from multiple content areas and construct deeper understandings of content (Anderson, 2017). For the pre-school class above, teachers were able to integrate science, technology, and math (STEM) as well as art in the unit. Connections were also repeatedly made between the classroom and the community as students made multiple field trips to investigate bridges.

In the rural Kansas community of Leon, elementary teachers participated in the Ag in the Classroom program to integrate agriculture-related content with other content areas (Wilson, 2021). The success of this instruction led to improved agricultural literacy and a pursuit of more hands-on opportunities for students. As a result, the schoolboard and community invested in a barn with a classroom to support integrated agricultural instruction. While education is often abstracted from the local context and can teach students “to become effective strangers, deployable anywhere” (Corbett, 2004, p. 464), integration of the local farming economy into the elementary curriculum validated children’s experiences with farming and tied education to

reasons to stay in the rural community. A few years after the district built the barn the community grocery store closed, so the district purchased a storefront in downtown Leon and opened a student-run retail store in response to the community's need for food access. The store provided high school students hands-on experience in business and financial literacy and connections to the community (Wilson, 2021). Through connections to the community in place-based education, connections like what this store provided, students learned "that they have the capacity to use their minds and energy to make contributions to their communities that are valued by others and that promise to improve people's lives" (Gruenewald & Smith, 2014, p. xviii).

Place-based education can allow students to not only physically explore their community but to use their knowledge of their community and culture to broaden their understandings of other places. Nichols et al. (2016) described a high school social studies lesson investigating different countries' constitutions. Teachers of such lessons helped students focus first on the familiar, their own constitution, before examining similarities and differences in others' constitutions as a path to understanding other cultures and their own in greater depth. Community connections can also enrich place-based education. Peterson et al. (2020) described leveraging relationships with a local employer and community library to ensure students had access to technology services during the COVID-19 pandemic. Burgess and Anderson (2020) discussed the benefits of connecting with non-profits, digital media organizations, and families in order to support students' transition to digital learning during the pandemic, acknowledging the limited experiences students had with digital learning in their community until that point.

Literacy Support within a Place-Conscious Pedagogy

Brian Street (2003) pointed out that “literacy varies from one context to another and from one culture to another and so, therefore, do the effects of the different literacies in different conditions” (p. 77). It is therefore necessary for teachers to consider the greater contexts in which they are teaching, what literacies are valued in those contexts, and how academic literacies may be connected with other out-of-school literacies in which youth engage. Though often undervalued, middle school students build large amounts of knowledge from resources all around them: at school, at work, at home, with friends, in clubs, online, and more (Moje, 2002). Teachers can tap into these in- and out-of-school funds of knowledge to help students engage with academic reading activities. Connecting what is learned in school with what is familiar to students in out-of-school settings supports their being more engaged; their using prior knowledge supports better connections with and learning of information and skills (Del Nero, 2019a; Ivey & Johnston, 2015; Pittman & Honchell, 2014). The rural context may also play a role in the extent to which students value what they read. Cantrell et al. (2018) found that, while intrinsic motivation to read does impact the usefulness students see in the act of reading, it may not be enough to keep rural middle school and high school students engaged with reading. After discovering students increased their out-of-school reading over the transition from middle to high school though their desire to do well with reading dropped, the authors suggest that teachers need to help students “see how reading is practically useful in their lives” (p. 425). This can only be done when teachers understand the larger contexts, the places, in which students live.

Summary

Understanding what factors help middle school students in rural schools establish positive reading identities can allow educators to help students position themselves positively as

readers in school. Middle school students' reading identities are tied to their motivations to read and their perceptions of their abilities to read. When teachers and others within the school system position students negatively, giving them identities of poor readers, students have a harder time positioning themselves in a positive light as readers. Instead, when teachers build positive relationships with their students and create opportunities for students to have choice in their reading, engage in independent reading, and engage socially with peers in discussion about their reading, they create opportunities for students to view themselves positively as readers, leading to greater reading engagement and success. In a rural setting, when teachers help students make connections between their in- and out-of-school lives and literacies, students can see more value for reading and can make greater connections in the content they are learning. The rural location can become a resource in the strengthening of reading identities when such connections are made.

This chapter provided a review of literature regarding theories behind identity construction and reading identities, literature related to the roles of motivation and positioning related to reading identity construction, and literature regarding the rural context, place consciousness, and place-based education. Chapter Three presents the research methodology that was used to conduct the study.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

This chapter provides an outline of the methodology used in this research study. The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of middle school students in a rural Kansas school as they read and engaged with text in and outside of the school setting. This study sought to examine how the student participants perceived themselves as readers and what factors in their lives shaped those perceptions in order to determine whether the rural setting influences reading identity construction in middle school students. This chapter begins by providing a subjectivity statement and an exploration of qualitative inquiry methods utilized in this study as well as other methods of inquiry. This is followed by an outline of the research design which includes the following sections: (a) timeline, (b) participant selection, (c) research site, (d) membership role, (e) data collection methods, (f) data analysis, (g) establishing trustworthiness, and (h) ethics.

Subjectivity Statement

It was not possible for me to approach this topic wholly objectively. If, indeed, “meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Crotty, 1998/2015, p. 43), then my experiences and knowledge influenced my interpretations as I constructed meaning from my research. It was not possible for me “to stand outside the research process and evaluate it in any absolute way” (Morgan, 1983, p. 14). Instead, I brought myself to my encounters with my participants and engaged with them and their experiences informed by my own experiences as a teacher and rural resident.

After six years of teaching high school freshmen through juniors, I moved to the middle school level and developed a passion for this quirky age group. I have seen great potential in what middle school students can accomplish and want the best instruction for them. I will be

quick to admit that I have not always provided the best instruction. My education in literacy instruction is an ever-continuing process. As a former middle and high school teacher and as an educator of reading specialists in a master's degree program, I am aware of effective practices that teachers can employ to motivate students and engage them in reading activities. I am also aware of those practices which discourage students from reading. It can be difficult to observe students experiencing the latter group of practices when I know that there are better options for them.

Living in a rural community of less than 175 people situated in a rural county of just under 3,000 residents, I have also developed a passion for rural communities and what they provide for their citizens: support for one another, interconnectedness (Theobald, 1997). While some may write off small towns surrounded by dirt roads and dependent on agriculture as insignificant, I have seen potential in these communities for supporting the education of their children and providing support to families. Likewise, I see the same potential as Theobald (1997) for rural schools to renew a sense of community in towns that are shrinking and losing a sense of pride in who they are and what they have been (Theobald & Campbell, 2014). Like other rural Kansas counties, the 2020 census revealed a decline in my county's population as young people leave for education and jobs available in more populous areas of the state (Hannah & Field, 2021). In this research, I hoped to find ways to support rural educators in order to support the rural communities in which they teach.

Qualitative Inquiry

Qualitative researchers seek to understand human experiences. These experiences, though, are not a set of causes and effects as are often laid out in quantitative research, but rather a complex series of events (Stake, 1995). To get at the heart of the events, the researcher must

diligently watch and listen. Education research is especially complex as “human learning through schooling is embedded in various layers of social context, thus creating profoundly complex interactions among people, knowledge, institutions, policies, time, and so forth” (Kelly, 2006, p. 38). Qualitative research seeks to explore and understand these complex interrelationships (Stake, 1995).

Narrative Inquiry

Humans have been telling stories for thousands of years. Our storytelling predates our writing and reading. This is how we have handed down our histories and shared lessons and warnings with our children. It seems only natural, then, to center in on the stories participants tell in research and to create rich stories from them and other data collected in order to help both researcher and readers better understand the experiences being explored. Through narrative inquiry, the participant, the researcher, and the reader come to greater understandings of phenomena through the telling, analyzing, reconstructing, and reading of stories of lived experiences (Kim, 2016). As Bhattacharya (2017) explained, “narrative inquiry is a framework that helps researchers explore, discover, understand, and construct stories based on the participants’ recounting of their experiences” (p. 93). Narrative inquiry uses participant storytelling as data. First-person accounts of experiences may come in the form of autobiographies, life histories, interviews, journals, letters, and more (Mirriam & Tisdell, 2015). Kramp (2004) explained that “narrative enables the storyteller to organize the story told by linking events, perceptions, and experiences” (p. 107). Narrative inquiry moves an experience from being merely an experience to being something with meaning. Emphasis is placed on how the stories are told, the words used to tell them as well as the gaps between words, the pieces not told. Because of this, many narrative researchers look to Mikhail Bakhtin’s work.

Bakhtin (1981) acknowledged the nature of words and discourse, that we speak with layers of meanings influenced by time, surroundings, and experience. Narrative inquiry allows researchers, narrators, and readers to explore those layers and various ways of constructing understanding. Bakhtin distinguished between those seeking unity in language and the true nature of language that is centrifugal. Similarly, Polkinghorne, (2010) emphasized the difference between pragmatic thinking, the source of theoretical knowledge, and narrative thinking. Whereas pragmatic thinking renders knowledge that is not sensitive to time or place and is applicable to “the average of an aggregate of people” (p. 393), “narrative thinking is more closely attuned to expressing human experience” (p. 395). Narrative thinking, like language itself, is multi-layered, examining how past events have influenced current situations and considering how future actions may have future results (Polkinghorne, 2010). Jerome Bruner (1987), a commonly referenced narrative theorist and researcher, expanded on the multi-layeredness of narrative in pointing out that the process of telling our stories is reflexive. As stories are told they may be revised with pieces omitted, elements enhanced, details confused. However, for Bruner this fact made the narrative all the more valuable. The narrative is a reflection not only of the person and an experience but of “culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes” (p. 694). The narrative, then, gives insight into multiple aspects of a person and how they structure their experiences.

Narrative Inquiry in the Study

I began my career in education as a high school English teacher. I spent my first several years teaching high school freshmen and sophomores how to break down a story into its elements of plot, to analyze characters, and to identify themes. Reading stories, hearing stories, and telling stories seems natural for me, especially when researching reading identities. Stories

are a natural way for people to organize information; we remember better what is organized linearly with a plot structure (Saldaña, 2011). I chose narrative inquiry because qualitative methods acknowledge the relevance of the context of place, which is an especially important consideration with regard to rural education and developing practices that are effective in a rural context (Eppley et al., 2018; Gruenewald, 2003a, 2003b).

This narrative investigation of a collective case study helped me better understand the role that the rural setting plays in middle school students' reading identity construction. Having grown up in a small Kansas town with strong ties to the surrounding rural community and having lived in a small, rural community in Kansas for the last 24 years, I believe there are strengths in rural communities that can be leveraged for the benefit of students and their positive reading identity construction. At the same time, I realize that there are potential negatives. When teachers, administrators, and community members are aware of those elements that support students' construction of strong positive reading identities and those elements that deter such construction, they can better position students to be successful readers with positive reading identities.

Case Study

Stake (1995) explained, "Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). The case, or "bounded system" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) being studied in depth may be an individual or an entire organization. In education, a researcher may be examining the experiences of a student, the classroom the student is in, or the entire school system in which that classroom is situated. Case study can come in different forms including single instrumental case study, collective/multiple case studies, and intrinsic case study (Bhattacharya, 2017).

The researcher's focus shapes the type of case study conducted. According to Stake, in an intrinsic case study, the researcher's focus is on the case itself. The researcher sees the need to learn about one particular case. At times, the researcher may need to assess whether their own interests eclipse the case and bring the focus back to the case as needed. In an instrumental case study, on the other hand, studying the case serves as an instrument to understanding a more general question or concept. Here, the researcher uses the case study to understand something beyond the case. Often in instrumental case studies, because the focus is centered more on the issue than the individual case, researchers choose to use a collective case study to look at several cases in order to learn more about the issue at hand (1995).

Because this study sought to understand middle school student reading identity construction, I chose to utilize collective case study which allowed me to examine the experiences of multiple rural middle school students in depth, identify patterns within the individual experiences and then compare these patterns across participants (Stake, 1995). Collective case study is often conducted using several instrumental case studies. These are focused on understanding an issue in more depth. Collective case study allowed me to examine similarities and differences among the individual participants and share rural middle school students' stories in a way that may help educators identify ways to provide similar students positive supports in constructing positive reading identities.

Other Methods of Inquiry

Not all methods of inquiry were deemed appropriate for providing answers to my research questions. Quantitative, experimental research centers on certainty. Emphasis is placed on control and validity for generalizability in the end; participants are randomly assigned groups, and researchers seek to control for confounding influences on the data (Creswell, 2003).

Neugebauer (2014) used a survey method to identify whether a daily reading log impacted student performance compared to a non-context specific reading measure. Neugebauer found that highly motivated poor readers performed worse than unmotivated poor readers on a state reading exam. Based on the literature, Neugebauer hypothesized this could be a result of poor readers who are highly motivated being easily drawn to details in a text that draw them away from important ideas. Alvermann et al. (2007) examined daily out-of-school time activity logs for students participating in an after-school media club and a control group. Among their findings, the authors discovered that the teen participants read about twice as much outside of school that was found in a previous study. This discovery left the authors wondering why their participants recorded reading so much more. Quantitative research answers the questions regarding what is happening, but it does not answer the questions of how and why something is happening, as Alvermann et al. and Neugebauer discovered. I wanted to understand how rural middle school students construct their reading identities, how different factors influence them, and why those factors have an influence. These questions cannot be answered with quantitative research.

Ethnography is a qualitative approach that examines “people within the context of their culture” (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 25). Gregory (2016) utilized the data from several ethnographic studies to identify how children learn complex texts. Children in these studies learned complex text at home or in a religious setting with family. Gregory explained that children learned the texts as part of belonging to a community and encourages further examination of the at-home learning that takes place in children’s lives. While the rural context I have investigated can be considered a culture, there were other cultures at play for my participants as they constructed reading identities, as well. First of all, each of four participants came to the research site, Rural School, from different towns; the fifth lived in the country outside of town limits; each of these

spaces possessed a unique culture. The school also had a culture of its own. Additionally, each student came from a family, each with its own unique set of ways for using language, acting, and thinking. Gee (1998) called these *discourses* and likened them to an “identity kit” (p. 1). Because there is the possibility for multiple cultures to converge in different ways for participants, ethnography was not the best choice for this research.

Phenomenology, like narrative inquiry, centers on people’s lived experiences. However, Saldaña (2011) explained that in using phenomenology the researcher synthesizes commonalities in multiple experiences to capture the essence of the larger shared experience. Glenn et al. (2018) examined experiences of high school students labeled as struggling readers to understand what students experience as they try to assert positive reader identities against institutionally-assigned negative reader identities. Fischer’s (2017) work showed the close relationship of phenomenology to narrative inquiry. For her interviews, she focused first on life history with regard to place and then on participants’ history as child readers. This information was used to identify that, in middle childhood, readers who believe that their reader identity impacts their sense of place tend to experience repositioning, transportation, nesting, and layering, through their reading experiences, all primarily outside of the school context. While I wanted to explore the impact of the rural setting on construction of reading identities, I expected that various factors would cause this construction to look different for each participant. As mentioned previously, the participants came from different communities. Additionally, several had attended different elementary schools from others and had very different experiences in those places. Unlike Glenn et al. (2018), I did not focus only on struggling readers. Unlike Fischer (2017), I found participants whose experiences with constructing reader identities were different, not

similar. Therefore, phenomenology, which looks at how participants share commonalities in an experience was not the best fit for my research.

Research Design

This study utilized narrative inquiry to explore a collective case study. The methods that follow were identified as the most effective way to examine how rural middle school students perceived themselves as readers and identify what factors in their lives shaped these perceptions.

Timeline

The research study took place during the spring semester of the 2021-2022 school year. Prior to submitting my study proposal to the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval, I received approval from the superintendent of schools of the research site. Following IRB approval on December 16, 2021(Appendix A), and the submission of a reliance agreement to the Fort Hays State University IRB on January 20, 2022, I scheduled my first visit to Rural School with the principal. I introduced the study to teachers and students of Rural School on February 9, 2022, and began classroom observations on February 16, 2022. I visited the site 26 times and concluded my visits and data gathering on May 13, 2022. A detailed research timeline of this 13-week study is provided in Appendix B. Table 3.1 provides a more concise outline of the research activities conducted and data collected throughout the study.

Participant Selection

Participants in this study included five student participants and seven teacher participants. Student participants submitted forms which their parents signed giving consent and which they signed giving assent. Teacher participants signed consent forms. All participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time.

Table 3.1. Study Timeline

Time Frame	Research Activity	Data Collected
Week 1	Meet faculty and introduce study; introduce study to seventh-grade students	
Week 2	Informal discussion with Mrs. Sanders; Observations; Participant recruitment	Field notes
Weeks 3-5	Round 1 student and teacher interviews; Observations	Interview transcripts; Interview notes; Field notes; Newspaper article; Journal reflections
Weeks 6-10	Interview Mrs. Spade; Observations; Email exchange;	Interview transcript; Field notes; Email; Newspaper articles; Journal reflections
Weeks 11-13	Round 2 Student and Teacher interviews; Additional interviews as needed; Observations; Email exchange; Debriefing	Interview transcripts; Interview notes; Field notes; Email; Newspaper articles; Journal reflections

Note: This table presence a brief overview of the time during which particular research activities were conducted and data was collected. A more detailed timeline is presented in Appendix B.

Student Participants

The student participants (all names of people and places are pseudonyms) were five students out of eleven in the seventh-grade class attending a rural Kansas PreK-12 school building. Participants selected were those who were willing and able to provide rich descriptions of their experiences as readers and who had experienced differing levels of success with reading (Ivey, 1999). Kvale (1996) noted that many interview studies use “15 ± 10” participants, and that the variation comes from the nature of the purpose of the study (p. 102). Because the intention was to understand individual students’ lived experiences, I did not need a large enough sample population to have findings that were generalizable. Instead, my focus with a small sample population was to elicit rich stories of rural middle school students’ experiences constructing their reading identities in order to better understand this phenomenon. Additionally, with just 11 students in the seventh grade, a sample of five seemed to be a significant representation of the group.

Student participants were those whose parents gave consent and who provided assent to participating in the research study. I introduced myself and the study to seventh-grade students during their Social Studies class on my first day in the building after having introduced myself and the study to the teachers before school that morning. Mrs. Beam, the Social Studies teacher, showed enthusiasm for the project and allowed me to observe her class that morning and introduced me to her students. Letters were given to the students present that morning to take home to parents/guardians, informing them of the study and asking for their consent. Students who wished to participate and secure consent from their parents were asked to return the signed forms to Mrs. Beam or to me. Mrs. Sanders, the reading specialist, demonstrated interest in and a passion for my project and was instrumental in visiting with two students in her differentiated reading instruction group and their parents to explain the importance of the study and secure consent. I had expected to give all seventh-grade students a survey modified slightly from the work of Ivey and Broaddus (2001) from which I, in consultation with their teachers, would have narrowed down the participant pool to my focal student participants. However, only five students showed an interest in participating and secured parental consent. I also faced additional complications in not wanting to take valuable instructional time to try to administer the survey. I eventually determined the survey was unnecessary. Because several teachers commented that I had a diverse group represented in my sample of five, I decided to not seek any additional student participants for a pool from which to select focal student participants.

Ash

The 2021-2022 school year was Ash's first year attending Rural School. She lived in Small Town, about 25 miles away, and had previously attended Small Town Elementary School. Each day a parent drove Ash and her siblings, a brother who was also in seventh grade and a

sister in elementary school, just over 15 miles to Midway, a small town in the Rural School district, where they got on the bus that took them to Rural School. Ash played bass drum in the junior high band. She had some problems with attendance. She also procrastinated and struggled to turn work in on time. She had been placed in one of the more advanced Differentiated Reading Instruction (DRI) classes with all high school students.

Charlie

Charlie was excited to participate in this research and was the first to bring me his consent/assent form. During the study, he received support from the Special Education teacher, but his instruction was fully integrated in the regular education classrooms. Charlie lived in the country outside Rural Town and enjoyed the quiet that country life brought. He was involved in 4-H and at his church. Just before I arrived at Rural School, Charlie had organized a petition requesting middle school students be allowed to take their laptops home at night. This petition was successful before the school board, and the policy changed at spring break. Throughout the study, Charlie regularly asked me to attend his math class, convinced his teacher would be nicer when I was present. Charlie played trumpet in the junior high band and seemed to enjoy singing in the junior high choir. Charlie liked to joke and enjoyed humor. He was also very interested in history and politics. Doing well in school was important to him. When I met him, he had just moved up one level from the lowest DRI group in the junior/senior high. During this study he was in a reading intervention group, taught by the English teacher, with students in eighth grade and high school.

Cooper

Cooper lived in Midway where he helped his father cut pipe for the oil fields. He liked baseball and other sports, often focusing on sports scores during current events discussions in

Social Studies. His enjoyment of baseball was clear when he got to call games for his Media Technology class. Cooper was very energetic and seemed to talk constantly sometimes. He was in the lowest reading intervention group which was taught by the Reading Specialist.

Kai

Kai lived in Rural Town. She was typically a quiet student who preferred not to volunteer most of the time and often kept to herself. This could be misleading, as the English teacher told me; sometimes the English teacher thought that Kai was understanding because her lack of participation failed reveal misunderstandings. Kai liked animals and was often tending to the guinea pigs in the science classroom or telling me about animals in interviews. Kai was proud of playing the trumpet in the junior high band. She was also interested in the history of Rural Town and the region. Kai's grandmother taught Math at Rural School and taught Mrs. Spade when she attended Rural School. Kai was also connected to Rural School through her mother who attended the same school. Kai did not enjoy her DRI class that she attended with a combination of other seventh graders and some eighth graders and high schoolers. This class was led by the assistant principal who served as the athletic director.

Lisa

Lisa lived in a small community near Small Town and attended Small Town Elementary School with Ash until sixth grade when she transferred to Rural School. Like Ash, she took the bus from Midway, which was about eight miles from her home, to Rural School. Lisa and her family made the decision for Lisa and her brother to attend Rural School after Lisa experienced bullying in elementary school. Lisa was very social and liked to talk during class. She often brought snacks that she shared with her peer group. Part way through the year, the reading

specialist moved Lisa into the lowest DRI group and spent time working with her one-on-one on decoding skills. Lisa noticed the improvement she made and said her teachers also noticed.

Teacher Participants

Seven teachers who each taught seventh grade students in some capacity were identified for participation and asked to sign a consent form to participate in the study. These participants were recruited by direct contact. I introduced myself to many of the junior/senior high teachers in a morning faculty meeting and explained the purpose of the study and data collection methods, answered questions, and elicited their assistance in recruiting student participants.

Mrs. Beam

Mrs. Beam taught seventh- and eighth-grade Social Studies, World History, U. S. History, Government and Economics, Psychology, and a DRI class at Rural School. She had taught for 24 years. Mrs. Beam expressed many concerns for trends in reading, wondering why reading struggles weren't being caught earlier and noticing reading habits and skills decreasing. She commented that 24 years ago she found students to be "highly literate being in a small school" (Interview #1). Back then she had students who were two grades ahead of students elsewhere. When I spoke to her, she believed there was a shift "going against us," that in the previous five years students had started "going backwards" (Interview #1). Mrs. Beam recognized that teaching students to read was a responsibility of all teachers, but she believed that also took time away from teaching content. In her Social Studies classes, Mrs. Beam had students read out loud in class as a form of reading support for their oral fluency; it allowed her to identify and help them with "pronunciation issues" (Interview #1). Mrs. Beam coordinated two junior/senior high trips in the 2021-2022 school year. The first was to a large metropolitan city about three hours away to visit a traveling Holocaust exhibit. The second trip took place in

May, and all the junior/senior high students visited a state history museum in a city nearly two and a half hours away. Mrs. Beam made the decision to retire at the end of the school year.

Mr. Broadfoot

Mr. Broadfoot taught seventh- and eighth-grade Math, Algebra I and II, Geometry, College Algebra, Public Speaking, Lifetime Recreation, and a DRI class. He had taught for many years in schools of varying sizes. His own children, he explained in his first interview, had no difficulty learning to read, yet he understood that many students in his classes struggled with reading, and he said, “I feel for those kids.” He acknowledged that school gets tougher as students progress if they do not have the necessary reading skills. Mr. Broadfoot also believed it was important for students to be held accountable for their reading and had them read aloud in his math and reading classes, since he also believed that practicing and doing something the right way should lead to improvement. Mr. Broadfoot also retired at the end of the school year.

Mr. Brown

Mr. Brown was the school’s music teacher. He provided instruction for the pre-kindergarten and elementary classes as well as band, choir, and guitar classes for the junior/senior high students. While not a core teacher and working with students in classes that did not always require significant application of literacy skills, Mr. Brown did inform me of some students’ successes and challenges. He also expressed concern for what students were experiencing during the state assessments and while attending a school that was facing additional challenges in the wake of a school board decision to close the junior/senior high following the 2022-2023 school year.

Mrs. Davis

Mrs. Davis taught all of the English classes in the junior/senior high at Rural School. She was also the forensics coach and taught the DRI class for readers classified the second lowest in ability in the building. The 2021-2022 school year was Mrs. Davis' first year at Rural School, though she had been teaching for around 20 years. Mrs. Davis expressed significant concern for her students. With respect to reading, she commented, "I don't know how many kids tell me, 'I'm not a good reader,' ...but they read well. Like, I hate the fact that they think they aren't a good reader... 'Who told you that?'" (Interview #1). Mrs. Davis took a teaching position at South High School, the other high school in the district, during the summer following the 2021-2022 school year.

Mrs. Ford

Mrs. Ford was the special education teacher for the junior/senior high. She also taught Media Technology and a DRI class. She provided services for Charlie who was also in her homeroom class. Cooper and Lisa were in her Media Technology class. It was in this class where I witnessed students who, though prone to being off task elsewhere, were on task, focused, and applying different skills than in their core classes. Mrs. Ford recognized the importance of students' having opportunities for problem solving which made me want to interview her for more insight into her perspective on literacy education in a rural setting.

Mrs. Sanders

Mrs. Sanders was the reading specialist for all of Rural School. She also taught second grade, so she utilized her planning time to complete her reading specialist duties, which included leading a reading intervention class for the lowest group of junior/senior high readers. Mrs. Sanders was very passionate about the block schedule that the junior/senior high used that

allowed all students to be engaged in DRI for 75 minutes every other day. She selected novels for study and created instructional packets that allowed teachers to teach comprehension skills and vocabulary while students read the books in their DRI classes. Two of Mrs. Sanders' own children attended Rural School, one in elementary and the other in high school. When the principal of Rural School was removed from his position in April, Mrs. Sanders was assigned the duties of elementary principal in addition to her other responsibilities.

Mrs. Spade

Mrs. Spade taught seventh- and eighth-grade Science, Physical Science, Biology, Chemistry, Anatomy and Physiology, Yearbook, and a DRI class. Mrs. Spade graduated Rural School, eventually returning to work as a paraprofessional in the junior/senior high. She left for a year to finish her bachelor's degree and returned to her para position. This work led her to pursuing an alternate route into the classroom, and she pursued a master's degree in education and her teaching license while working as the school's science teacher. She began that position in January, 2020. "I literally went from being, for some kids in this building, their para to a teacher in a month" (Interview #1). She explained that prior to her filling the position, other science teachers would stay for two or six months to a year and move on to another school. Because of the inconsistency in education students had been receiving, she wanted to "start over" and provide them instruction that would build each year to prepare students for the more difficult high school science courses. "It's starting to work. I can see it with my juniors that I had when they were eighth graders. They're like, 'Oh, yeah, I remember we talked about that'" (Interview #1).

Research Site

Middle schools in rural areas are varied across the United States with any number of combinations of grade levels attending school in the same building. The research took place at Rural School, a PreK-12 school building. I chose this site because a PreK-12 public school structure is fairly unique to rural areas. Attending such a school added to the uniqueness of the stories that participants shared. In the 2021-2022 school year, according to the state report card, 100% of Rural School's 63 students in grades 7-12 were white, African American, Hispanic, American Indian or Alaskan native, or multi-ethnic. Because of the small size of the student population and the small numbers in categories other than white, these other classifications were not disaggregated. Economically disadvantaged students made up 49% of the population. Students classified as having disabilities made up 22% of the population. No students were identified as English language learners (ELLs) or having migrant status. The attendance rate was 88.5%, below the state rate of 92.1%. The graduation rate for the 2020-2021 school year was calculated as 84.2%, below the state average of 88.1%. The dropout rate for the 2019-2020 school year (most recent data available) was calculated at 4.8%, above the state average of 1.3%.

The first day I arrived at Rural School, I walked in the front door which was situated just to the right of the library windows, the center of the front of the main portion of the building. From this doorway, I entered the cafeteria which was filled with elementary students eating their breakfasts. Junior/senior high students were sitting or standing outside their lockers down the hallway to my left. To my right, beyond the library, a hallway led to the elementary classrooms with Mrs. Sanders' second-grade classroom at the end of the hall. The building was balanced this way with classrooms for elementary on the right and the junior/senior high on the left, a shared library and cafeteria in the middle. Elementary students would pass through the junior/senior

high hallways on their way to the gym situated at the end of those hallways. Other than this, there were few interactions between the two levels.

Bells rang on the junior/senior high side of the building to notify students of the beginning of Homeroom, the first period of the day. The junior/senior high followed a five-by-five block schedule. This meant students had five classes, three in the morning and two in the afternoon that met every other day for 75 minutes each. Each day began with Homeroom which lasted 30 minutes, and lunch for the junior/senior high followed the elementary each day, lasting 35 minutes. Passing periods between classes were three minutes long. For the seventh grade, one schedule was Homeroom, English, Junior High Band or Media Technology, DRI, lunch, Woods or Art, and Physical Education. The alternating schedule was Homeroom, Science, Social Studies, Math, lunch, Junior High Choir, and Family and Consumer Sciences (FACS).

Rural School was located in Rural Town, which had a population of 859 in the 2020 census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). According to census data, 21% of the town's residents had a bachelor's degree or higher. Rural Town was within a few miles of a major interstate highway. Rural School was in one of three school districts serving Rural County. According to the U.S. Census of Agriculture, 85% of the land in Rural County was dedicated to farming in 2017 (United States Department of Agriculture, 2019).

Rural School shared a parking lot with the local Catholic church. The Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) was involved in community service in Rural Town. There were three other churches in Rural Town. One did not advertise any children's programming. The other two may have, but I witnessed small-town churches in the region experience a decline in attendance of young families over previous years, so such programming may not have existed.

Rural Town's Chamber of Commerce scheduled regular events for the community throughout the year, and school events were included in the Chamber online community calendar. The community had an active American Legion and a Boy Scout troop. Throughout the school year, the Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter engaged in community service activities. In April, the local 4-H club organized a community Easter egg hunt. A summer baseball league which competed against teams from other small communities in the region was available for kindergarteners through eighteen-year-olds. The public library hosted a summer reading program with children attending activities once a week through the month of June.

Membership Role

Throughout my research, I positioned myself primarily as an “observer-as-participant” (Gold, 1958, p. 221) in seventh-grade classrooms in Rural School. While I had hoped to move from a peripheral membership role to a more active membership role (Adler & Adler, 1994) as I became more acquainted with teachers and students, developing a trusting relationship with them proved difficult, especially with the turmoil Rural School was facing as the school board considered in March and then voted in April to close the junior/senior high school following the 2022-2023 school year.

As a former middle school teacher, reading specialist, and university instructor in education, I am familiar with best practices in literacy instruction at the middle level. I have been an insider within multiple school buildings and understand the nature of relationship building within these settings. However, I have not worked in rural schools and have never worked within a PreK-12 building. Every educational setting is unique, but these two factors made this research site particularly unique to my experiences. I found that I needed to be open throughout the

research study to learning from those around me about their unique experiences working and being students within a rural PreK-12 school building.

As a member of a rural community in the region, I believe I was able to connect with teachers and community members on a level of having a shared interest in our rural spaces and the education of children within those communities.

Data Collection Methods

Data was collected utilizing interviews, field notes from observations, and additional data sources like email exchanges with teachers and newspaper articles. All of these provided insight into the school's role in students' reading identity construction. Data collection and analysis was aligned with each of the research questions. This alignment is outlined in Table 3.1.

Interviews

I conducted one to three separate interviews lasting approximately 30 minutes with each of the student participants and the teacher participants. These were semi-structured interviews following the interview protocol found in Appendix C. Table 3.2 provides information on how many interviews were conducted with each participant and whether interviews were recorded and transcribed. I conducted an extra interview with Charlie; during his second interview, he spent a considerable amount of time describing a book he was writing, and I still had questions that I hoped to get answered. He was happy to meet with me a third time. Cooper chose to only participate in one interview, so there was not a follow-up interview with him. Due to changes in responsibilities for Mrs. Sanders and time constraints for both Mrs. Sanders and Mrs. Spade, I was unable to interview either teacher a second time. It was late in the semester when I decided Mrs. Ford may have information that would benefit the study; due to time constraints, she was most comfortable answering my questions in email.

Table 3.2 Research Question, Data Collection, and Data Analysis

Research Questions	Data Collection/Data Sources	Data Analysis
Overarching Question: How does a rural setting influence middle school students' reading identity construction?	• Audio recordings of interviews with student participants • Observations/field notes • Audio recordings of or notes from interviews with teachers • Email exchanges with teachers	• Review field notes and document reflections in journal • Type notes from interviews not recorded and review • Journal reflections on transcription, typed notes, and potential themes • Code transcription, notes, emails • Reconstruct tellings • Compare narratives • Code work samples • Identify patterns and themes
RQ 1: How do middle school students in a rural Kansas school describe themselves as readers?	• Audio recordings of interviews with student participants	• Transcribe audio recordings and review transcription • Journal reflections on transcription and potential themes • Code transcription • Journal reflections on coding • Reconstruct tellings • Compare narratives
RQ 2: How do middle school students in a rural Kansas school experience constructing their reading identities in and outside of the school setting?	• Audio recordings of interviews with student participants • Observations/field notes	• Transcribe audio recordings and review transcription • Journal reflections on transcription and potential themes • Code transcription • Journal reflections on coding • Identify relationships between transcript data and student work samples and focal participants' narratives • Construct matrix for cross-case analysis
RQ 3: What role does the educational environment play in shaping rural Kansas middle school students' reading identities?	• Audio recordings of interviews with student participants • Observations/field notes • Audio recordings of or notes from interviews with teachers • Email exchanges with teachers • Newspaper articles	• Transcribe audio recordings and review transcription • Type notes from interviews not recorded and review • Journal reflections on transcription, typed notes, and potential themes • Code transcription, notes, emails • Reconstruct tellings • Compare narratives • Code newspaper articles • Identify patterns and themes

Note. This table shows how data collection methods and data sources and data analysis methods aligned with each research question.

Kim (2016) stated, “telling stories is the primary way we express what we know and who we are” (p. 9). Interviews in which participants are invited to share their stories of their construction of their understandings are a valuable source of data in narrative inquiry as they allow individuals the opportunity to communicate with the researcher their unique perspectives. I was especially considerate in conducting interviews with teenagers. Because teens are an often-marginalized population (Saldaña, 2016), I worked to establish rapport with each teen participant, assuring them they were in charge of what we discussed and when we stopped, as a means of empowering each teen in working with an adult interviewer (Alderson et al., 2005). Narrative interviewing is especially beneficial in working with teen participants. Whereas teens are typically accustomed to adults having power over them, the narrative interview structure places more power in the participants’ hands (Kim, 2016). Interviewing children, Alderson et al. (2005) emphasized, is “not about ‘unearthing things’; rather it is about constructing an account with a child” (p. 151). Pilot study results indicated that 30-minute interviews with student participants would provide appropriate data for analysis each time. Homeroom, which was a 27-minute period at the beginning of the day, proved to be the best time to interview student participants to not interfere with academics.

Teacher participants were allowed to determine the best times for interviews for their schedules. These were limited to 30 minutes or less. Teachers were given the option of being recorded. Mrs. Beam and Mr. Broadfoot both chose to not be recorded during their interviews; therefore, there is no transcript, only written notes for their interviews. I also informed teachers at the beginning of each interview that they were in charge of the interview, could choose what to answer or talk about, and could end the interview at any time.

Table 3.3. Data Collection Methods per Participant

Participant	Interview #1	Interview #2	Interview #3	Email	Audio Recording Transcription
Ash	X	X			X
Charlie	X	X	X		X
Cooper	X				X
Kai	X	X			X
Lisa	X	X			X
Mrs. Beam	X	X			
Mr. Broadfoot	X	X			
Mr. Brown				X	
Mrs. Davis	X	X			X
Mrs. Ford				X	
Mrs. Sanders	X				X
Mrs. Spade	X				X

Note. This table shows in what form data was collected from each participant and whether interviews were audio recorded. Notes were handwritten when the participant did not wish to be recorded.

Observations

I observed the students within the school setting in various locations throughout the research period. The locations included the English, Math, Science, and Social Studies classrooms as well as Media Technology, Band/Choir, Homeroom, and DRI classrooms and the library. When observing, I kept detailed field notes.

An observation “provides here-and-now experience in depth” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 273). This data source allowed me to see what student participants experienced as they navigated constructing reading identities in the school setting. For Stake (1995), the qualitative approach to observation meant “finding good moments to reveal the unique complexity of the case” (p. 63); this complexity was occasionally clear during the observation but was often made more clear later in the analysis stage. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that early in the research observations may be more unstructured than later when the researcher has a particular focus

formed from insights developed earlier in the research project. Stake (1995) advised that, throughout the project, observations should include rich descriptions that paint a clear picture for the reader, and I strived to do provide descriptions that did just that.

Additional Data Sources

In addition to interviews and observations, data sources included email exchanges with teachers (see Table 3.2) and newspaper articles. These items provided insight into the role of the education environment in reading identity construction.

Data Analysis

Data collected from field notes, interviews, and additional resources of teacher emails and newspaper articles were analyzed in multiple stages. These were analyzed in particular ways to answer each specific research question. What follows outlines the process of data analysis used throughout the study.

Field Notes

Following each day on site, I typed field notes from observations that had been handwritten. This process allowed me to begin analyzing and reflecting on data in the first of several recursive phases (Ivey, 1999). At the completion of the study, I reviewed all field notes to identify patterns and note general impressions, coding while reading at a more detailed level, and identify and organize patterns. This process aligned with Harré's (2015) recommendation to first "begin with a common-sense analysis" of data, then "propose an explanation for the phenomena" (p. 267).

Interviews

For all student participants and several teacher participants, I was able to digitally record interviews as I conducted them (see Table 3.2). This allowed me to transcribe recordings

following interviews. For interviews with teacher participants who chose to not be recorded, I took notes during each interview and typed these as soon after the interview as was possible to document most accurately the information conveyed in each interview. Upon completion of transcripts or typed notes, I reviewed the documents and began to make notes and rough codes to begin to identify and organize patterns, similarly to how I approached field notes. A more detailed approach was taken later as I began to explore specific research questions. Following each review, I documented my thinking in a research journal

Additional Resources

Written documents including email exchanges and newspaper articles were coded initially in a manner similar to field notes and interview transcripts and notes.

Analyzing Data for Research Questions

The research sub-questions each built upon one another. RQ 1 provided support for answering RQ 2 with additional data, RQ 2 for RQ 3, and all sub-questions informed the answer to the overarching question. Therefore, I chose to analyze data in a way that allowed me to best answer each individual question. Thus, my questions shaped my analysis and interpretation of my data (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Analyzing data for RQ 1

To understand how the participants described themselves as readers, I started analyzing for the first sub-question by reading transcripts from interviews with student participants multiple times. These were coded using a method of Process Coding. Saldaña (2016) explained that Process Coding, also known as “action coding,” “uses gerunds exclusively to connote action in the data” (Charmaz, 2002, as cited in Saldaña, 2016, p. 111). I chose this method because I was focusing on the student participants’ active construction of their reading identities. It was

logical to look at the verbs that related to that construction. Codes were organized by student participant as each student participant was considered an individual case. Stake (1995) defined the case as a bounded system. Because I was investigating factors that influenced middle school students' reading identities in and outside of school, I wanted first to identify those potential factors for each individual case. I chose to physically interact with the data by organizing codes into groups on a table in what Saldana (2016) calls "tabletop categories" (p. 230). This led to a form of poetic reconstruction (Saldana, 2016) which allowed me to better consolidate codes. A partial example from my poetic reconstruction of Charlie's story follows:

Charlie likes to read non-fiction, history,
Likes learning about Shakespeare, World War II, birds, and astronomy,
Likes reading the weekly county newspaper, especially the political cartoons,
Likes reading magazines to learn the latest about England's royal family,
Likes researching theories of Jack the Ripper and the Titanic on the web.
Reading "makes the mind grow," he tells me.

Charlie got totally hooked on the *39 Clues* series,
Liked being surprised,
Found the books and characters interesting,
Enjoyed the connection to history.

Charlie needs a quiet room without distraction,
Gets stuck on the same line and doesn't understand what he reads when there's noise.
Reading is hard when people are talking or yelling and shouting.

As I narrowed my focus and combined codes into larger themes, I created charts for each participant to understand how codes were organized under larger themes. Figure 3.1 is an example of this process with the data surrounding Lisa's story. In this process, I color coded three ways in which Lisa described herself as a reader and the codes that supported those descriptions. I conducted a similar process with the data for each participant. I concluded this first step of analysis by looking at the key descriptions of each participant to identify any overarching themes among the group.

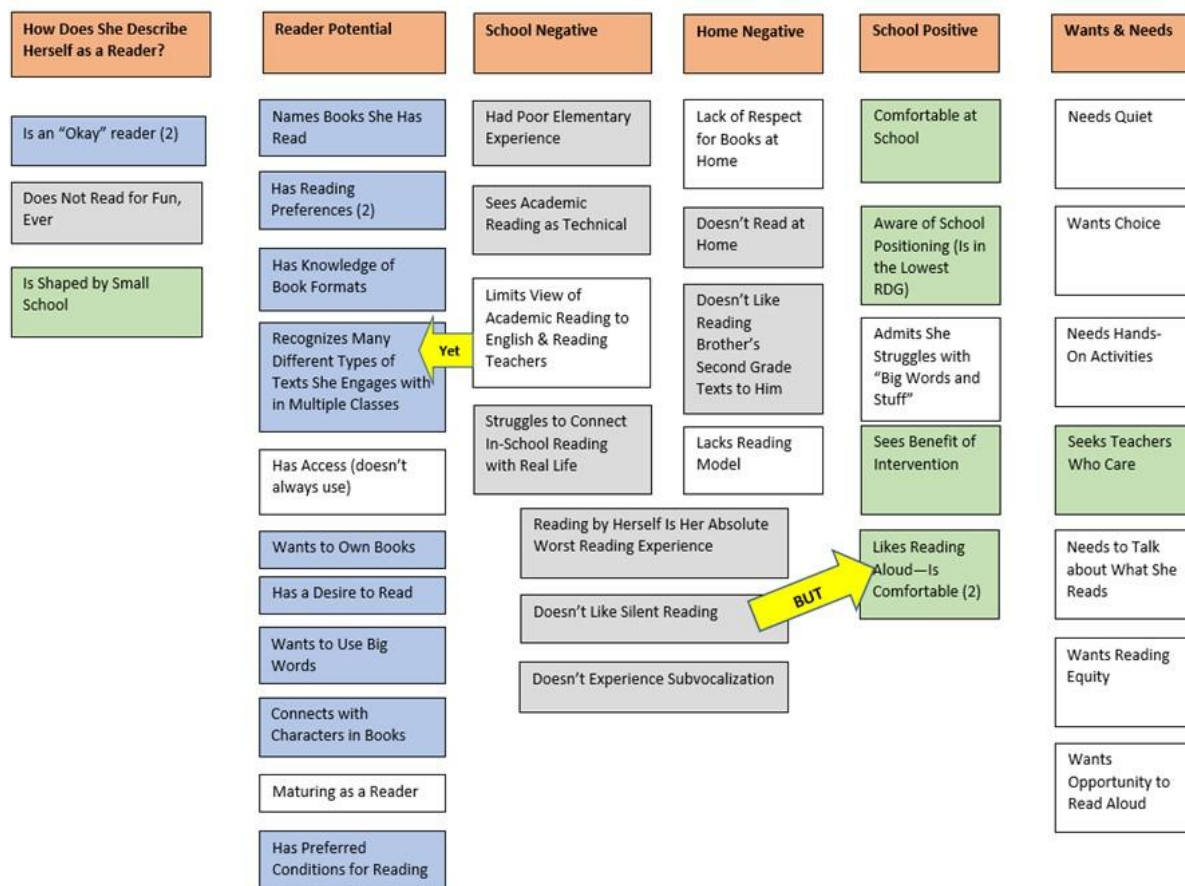


Figure 3.1. Second Round Coding of Lisa's Interviews

Analyzing data for RQ 2

To understand how the participants experienced constructing their reading identities in and outside of the school setting, I analyzed the data from the field notes taken during observations of the participants in their classrooms. Again, I used a method of Process Coding (Saldaña, 2016). I first organized the data by participant, pulling coded data from each day's notes. I could then compare themes from this data to themes from the interviews to understand participants' experiences more fully. I then created a matrix of common themes (Appendix D) to allow for cross-case analysis using a method of stacking comparable cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I identified five areas in which each student had significant experiences: positioning, DRI experience, experiencing success, struggling, and connecting. I then placed themes from the individual data analysis process in each category for each student. This process allowed me to compare the students and identify commonalities in how they experienced constructing their reading identities.

Data analysis for RQ 3

To understand the role that the educational environment played in shaping rural middle school students' reading identities, I examined data from teacher interviews and emails in addition to all other data that had already been analyzed. Teacher interviews and emails were coded using a method of Initial Coding that Saldaña claimed "is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies" (2016, p. 115). Through this process I coded sentence by sentence or occasionally paragraph by paragraph. To understand how these many codes related to each other, I then chose to physically interact with the data as I had with the student participants' interviews and organizing codes into "tabletop categories" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 230). From this point, I could create a diagram to understand how codes were working together. This is displayed in Figure 3.2.

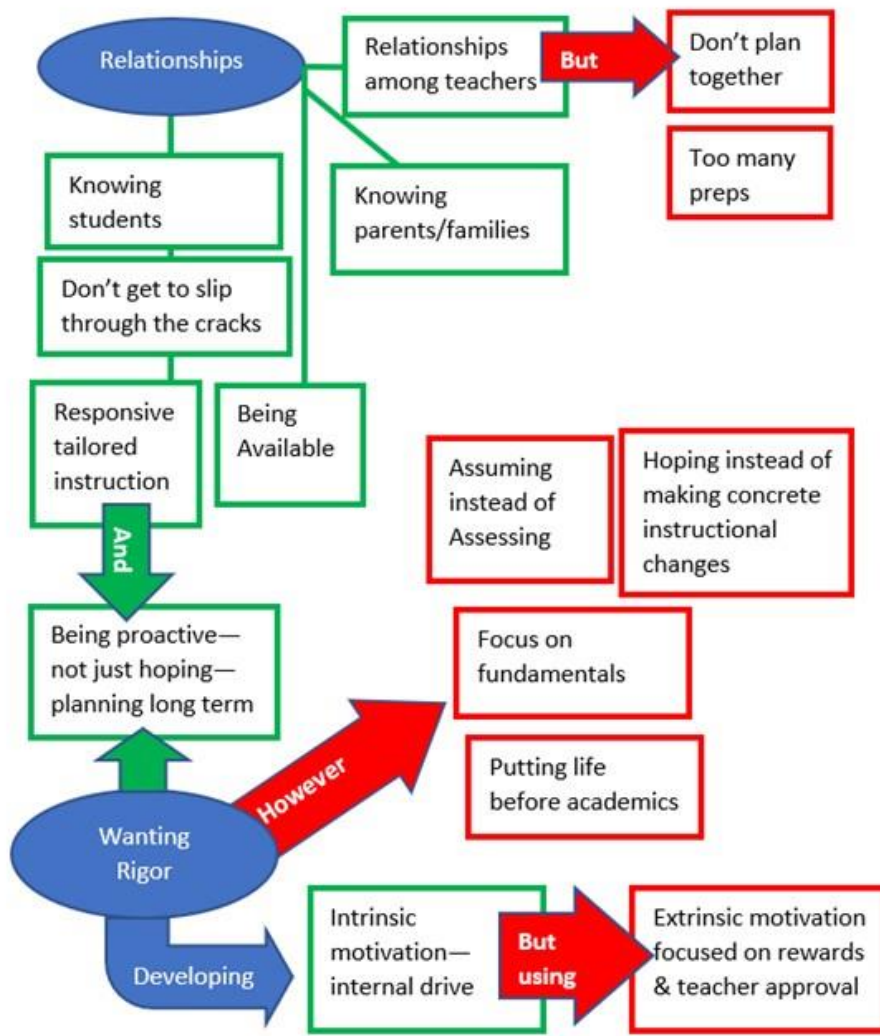


Figure 3.2. Diagram of RQ 3 Codes

Data analysis for overarching question

To understand the role the rural setting played in middle school students' construction of their reading identities, I reviewed all of the data I had previously analyzed to answer the three sub-questions. In addition to this, I reviewed articles from the Rural County newspaper and coded these using a method of Initial Coding (Saldaña, 2016) as I had done with teacher

interviews. In analyzing all of this information, I looked specifically for experiences and themes that were unique to the rural setting.

Establishing Trustworthiness

To maintain trustworthiness throughout the process, I took several steps. I used a reflexive journal to keep a record of my own thoughts, reflections, and developing insights throughout the research project as well as to keep record of methodological decisions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I also used peer debriefing with a colleague who has experience working with middle school students in a rural school setting. I conducted member checks with three of the seven teacher participants, sending them each a summary of my findings and asking for their feedback or questions. Throughout the writing that follows, I utilize thick description in my data analysis and reporting (Geertz, 1973, as cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Narratives were reconstructed to reflect student participants' experiences with constructing their reading identities. Multiple tables and figures are presented to represent data collected. These will include a table explaining data sources. Additionally, a stacking matrix is presented to demonstrate how cases were compared during the cross-case analysis.

Ethics

To ensure ethical practice, the proposed research was submitted to the Kansas State University IRB for approval. This proposal included a letter of permission to conduct the proposed research from the research site superintendent of schools. It also outlined steps that were taken to ensure participant privacy. A plan for using pseudonyms for all participants and places was specified. A plan was also provided for storing data on a secured laptop or in a locked file drawer for no more than five years after the conclusion of the study. The plan also included

details for eventually destroying that data. Once IRB approval was received, I submitted a reliance agreement to the Fort Hays State University IRB as an employee of that institution.

Qualitative researchers seek to understand “the complex interrelationships among all that exists” (Stake, 1995, p. 37). When this understanding involves the perspectives of individuals, as it often does, the researcher has a responsibility to the individuals to portray those perspectives accurately. Likewise, the case study researcher has a responsibility to the reader to accurately portray the complexities of each case (Stake, 1995). To gain the understanding necessary to meet these responsibilities, the qualitative researcher must come to know individuals, ask questions about their experiences, observe their interactions, and make interpretations based on these things. Acknowledging the complexities of qualitative research, Tisdale (2004) emphasized that qualitative research is not as simple as following the steps laid out for and approved by the IRB.

This research was particularly complex due to the role of the student participants. Research with children should be conducted with the vulnerability of this population in mind. Steps for securing consent and assent were outlined in the IRB application and adhered to; additionally, the protection of the participants was considered throughout each step of the research. Daniels et al. (2002) stressed the importance of protecting children’s rights and dignity; this includes protecting confidentiality by not recording names of individuals in notes. Adult-child relationships outside of research are much different than those in the research setting. Grau and Walsh (1998) highlighted the role of the child as teacher in the research setting; at few other times are children seen as the “knowledge holders” (p. 57). Allowing the child participant to establish the ground rules for interviews and interactions with the adult researcher further empowered the participant in this situation in which flipped roles may have already created discomfort and uncertainty (Alderson et al., 2005).

Summary

Narrative inquiry was used to explore a collective case study to investigate the experiences of rural middle school students as they constructed their reading identities. Narrative inquiry allowed for a focus on each individual participant's story. Collective case study allowed for a structure in which to examine similarities and differences among the student participants.

In this 13-week study, I observed and interviewed five student participants who were seventh graders attending a rural Kansas public middle school. Seven teacher participants who worked with the students were also invited to participate in the study. Data was gathered through one to three interviews with each of the student participants and one to two interviews or email exchanges with each of the participating teachers. Data was also gathered through observation of the student participants in classrooms of participating teachers. Significant attention was given to ethical issues, and I strived to maintain trustworthiness throughout my reporting.

This chapter provided the reasoning for selecting a narrative exploration of a collective case study as well as the research design including timeline, participant selection, research site, data collection methods, data management and analysis, and data representation. The next chapter will provide a detailed reporting of the findings of the 13-week study.

Chapter 4 - Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences that middle school students attending a rural Kansas school had reading and engaging with text both in and outside of the school setting to understand the influence of the rural setting on the construction of their reading identities. When students see themselves as readers, they are more inclined to read. Students who read more perform better academically. Identifying how the reading identity construction of rural middle school students is influenced can help teachers and parents of these teachers provide support to help construct and maintain positive reading identities.

In this chapter, I provide findings for each of the sub-questions in order to arrive at findings for the overarching question. I first provide a description of participants and an individual analysis of each case to answer the first sub-question (RQ 1). I then present results of a cross analysis of cases to answer the second sub-question (RQ 2). Next, I present findings related to the third sub-question (RQ 3). Finally, I consider all these findings and answers in determining an answer to the overarching question.

RQ 1: How Do Middle School Students in a Rural Kansas School Describe Themselves as Readers?

To answer this first sub-question, I chose to focus on each individual participant as an individual case. Each participant in this study was unique and had unique experiences that helped shape their reading attitudes.

Ash

Ash was possibly the most complex of the readers. While she believed she was a good reader and showed potential of being a reader, she also discussed significant contradictions to these identities in her interviews.

Ash believed that she was a good reader.

Ash believed that she was a good reader in part because she scored high on reading assessments. Her reading skills were reaffirmed for her by her placement in one of the higher DRI groups in the junior/senior high; she was the lone middle school student in a DRI class with all high schoolers.

Ash showed potential of being a reader.

Having the ability to score well on reading tests confirmed Ash's competence, making the potential for seeing herself as a reader stronger. Ash expressed preference for reading mysteries and books involving crime solving. She was able to discuss with me some of the characters and a bit of the plot of the book she was reading at the time in her DRI class, *Unplugged* by Gordon Korman, noting the mystery that existed and needed to be solved. Additionally, Ash was able to describe a past experience when she got "hooked" on a book. She spoke excitedly about the *I Survived* series, especially the book *Tornado Terror* about the Tri-State Tornado of 1925. She described how this book was interesting to her because of the "scary stuff" and that it had her wondering, "What happened? Is this person alive? What stuff happened to them?" This experience prompted Ash to ask her grandmother to purchase her the series, which she did, so Ash now owns many of the *I Survived* books. Ash had received three books in another series from an aunt who lives out of state as well. In school, Ash saw the library as a refuge, a place where she could go when she needed to be alone. There she might have read on her computer, though she likely would not have read any books.

Ash contradicted her potential good reader identity in various ways.

Not reading in the library, or much at school overall, was just one of many contradictions to Ash's potential as a good reader. While she had high reading scores that may have indicated

she was a reader, Ash commented that she did not remember “half the things” she read. She preferred not to take notes in classes, feared reading aloud even among familiar classmates, said that she did not like reading because it was boring, did not enjoy reading with high schoolers in her reading class, and needed a reason to read. Just because students score well on reading tests does not indicate they are strong, capable readers. Ash’s contradictions seemed to indicate she may have needed additional support to reach her potential. Additionally, while Ash did own books, she did not know what all of them were. While she had a positive experience in elementary school with the *I Survived* books, she also had very negative experiences with bullying and with teachers who seemed to not care about her success or that of her brother. These experiences at Small Town Elementary led to her transfer to Rural School. These contradictions to Ash’s reading potential may have been related to her lack of interest in reading and may have needed to be addressed to help her position herself more as a reader.

Charlie

Charlie liked to read and saw himself as both a reader and a writer. Through analysis of the data, three themes were clear: Charlie was a reader who demonstrated behaviors of being a reader; Charlie had a limited view of the school/reading relationship; and Charlie had wants and needs that needed to be met for him to feel successful as a reader.

Charlie was a reader who demonstrated behaviors of being a reader.

As we talked in three different interviews, Charlie shared his passion for reading, telling me right off that he liked reading and thought it was important because “it makes the mind grow.” It was clear Charlie liked to read. He suggested non-readers should try the *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* series because the books have pictures, are interesting, and are funny. “Sometimes they have jokes that will make your day. They’re good books,” he told me enthusiastically.

Charlie's interests in books did not stop at humorous books, though. He enjoyed reading the 39 *Clues* series because of the suspense and the other interesting details in the books including that the main characters in the books "found out they were related to all these famous people like Benjamin Franklin and George Washington." This connected with Charlie's interests in history and politics.

Charlie liked visiting bookstores to see what options existed, and he owned books. Book ownership connected him to his family because his mother purchased some books for him, and he received other books from an uncle. Through books he was further connected to his family; the uncle who gave him books shared similar interests, so the books were particularly interesting to Charlie. Moreover, Charlie connected books and family through memories: memories of his deceased grandfather reading a book about Eeyore to him and memories of his mother reading a children's Bible to him when he was younger.

Because he saw himself as a writer, Charlie understood that reading helped him write better. It helped him get ideas for his books, and it helped him understand story structures. Charlie read beyond books, though. He enjoyed magazines with current events, especially stories about Great Britain's Royal Family. He also enjoyed the county newspaper, especially the political cartoons on the opinions page. Additionally, Charlie recognized that reading played a role in his life in other ways; it was needed in his 4-H club where he read rules for the fair or read his lines for skits that he and his club performed before judges; it was needed in church where he was a server and witnessed the priest reading the scripture, understanding the priest needed to know the stories he read to the congregation. Charlie believed it was important to read the stories in church as well, to be able to read them to the priest when asked.

Charlie had a limited view of the school/reading relationship.

Charlie tended to focus on the leisure purposes of reading and believed that reading was a distraction from his homework and grades. He explained,

I don't read often in school because I'm more worried about my grades, and I want to keep my grades up instead of letting them skyrocket down. See, my goal is to try to keep them up by the end of the year so I at least have a good grade. (Interview #1)

Charlie could see no connection to academics with the way he understood reading. Even though he preferred reading non-fiction in order to learn, he struggled to see how reading might play a role in some classes including PE, saying, "I like reading, but reading about PE sounds kind of boring." In his Social Studies class, students read books from the school library about some aspect of the history of their community, county, or state for a book report; Charlie also read several short stories in his English Language Arts class. When I asked about whether reading for his classes interested him, though, Charlie responded, "

No, 'cuz I'm told to read them. I like to *choose* (emphasis original) what I'm going to read. I don't like to be *told* (emphasis original) what to read. I don't like that. But then I don't read as much in junior high. (Interview #1)

Charlie had wants and needs that needed to be met for him to feel successful as a reader.

Charlie experienced a greater connection between reading and school expectations in elementary school. Reflecting on his elementary experience with Accelerated Reading (AR), Charlie expressed a desire to have goals in middle school as he did in elementary school. He also expressed a desire for more choice in what he read. Charlie's creating a petition to allow middle school students to take their laptops home reflected his desire for a level of autonomy he did not

always experience in school: “The teachers, I think, should trust us to be responsible with our computers.” The environment Charlie needed to be successful as a reader did not exist often in his classes. Though he needed quiet to read and understand his reading, Charlie’s seventh-grade classes were very noisy. He explained,

I can’t get distracted. Half the time when people are talking, I stay on the same line, and I don’t understand it, and I gotta keep repeating it and repeating it to myself. It takes me a long time when people are talking to me or yelling and shouting. It’s hard. (Interview #1)

Even moving into the hall did not achieve the level of quiet and removal of distraction he needed because it seemed to him on the junior/senior high side of the building that someone was always walking through the halls.

Cooper

Cooper also liked to read. His enjoyment of reading appeared to have been shaped in part by his positive reading experiences. The fact that Cooper liked to read allowed him to read beyond his school-assigned reading label.

Cooper liked to read and read beyond his school-assigned reading label.

Cooper could not think of any negative experiences he had ever had as a reader. While he was assigned to the lowest DRI class in the junior/senior high, Cooper still enjoyed reading and shared a variety of texts he read including books, magazines, and newspapers. Cooper understood multiple applications of reading both in and outside of school. He discussed how his mother read for leisure while his father had to be able to read the rules for derby competitions that he participated in. He said that his younger sister read, and while his older brother did not, his older brother had been responsible for advising Cooper on how to navigate big books and AR tests when Cooper was in elementary school.

Cooper's reading enjoyment was shaped in part by positive elementary reading experiences.

Teachers in Rural School's elementary classes utilized the AR program to incentivize reading. While this program can be detrimental for some students, Cooper enjoyed the challenge of having goals: "Reading was a challenge because you had to read so many books to make that goal." Those who achieved their goals were rewarded with parties, and Cooper enjoyed the extrinsic rewards; however, the goal seemed to be central to the experience. In discussing the AR tests that students would have to take after completing their books, I asked Cooper if he had ever failed any of the tests and how that had made him feel. Even though he had failed some tests, he attributed that to not being interested in those particular books and dismissed those scores as not being important in the long run. This conversation demonstrated Cooper had a clear understanding of the relationship among reading interest, engagement, and success. Discussions in class in elementary school sometimes gave Cooper ideas for what to read next. Cooper told me he had read a lot of books and named the *Magic Treehouse* and *Big Nate* series and the author Matt Christopher as favorites. *Magic Treehouse*, he said he enjoyed "because they're just like you're here, then you're there. Then they explore there. It takes a problem back in their time." This comment seemed to indicate Cooper could be "transported" by the books he read. He said that he preferred new books that he had not read before because "otherwise I know exactly what's going to happen, and it gets more boring." *Big Nate* books, Cooper said, were "easier, not just like straight up 3,000 pages of straight words." He enjoyed books about baseball and "some action books." He also said, "sometimes the little books are funner."

Kai

Kai did not know about herself as a reader, telling me, “I don’t really read a lot.” This lack of knowledge became one central theme in the interview discussions with Kai. The second theme was that Kai expressed significant contradictions to her own statement that she did not read much.

Kai did not know about herself as a reader.

Kai expressed that she was self-conscious and uncomfortable with reading aloud. This self-consciousness could have contributed to her not being aware of her own reading identity. Additionally, there was a disconnect between school and the world beyond school. Kai demonstrated interest in researching several topics including regional history and weather events which did not necessarily correlate with class assignments. While her regional history interest may have been sparked by a Social Studies assignment, this was not an ongoing project; yet Kai continued researching on her own. Kai expressed having an interest in tornadoes and hurricanes but did not have opportunity to connect these to other learning she was doing in her classes. When I asked about how people use reading outside of the school setting, Kai’s response was limited to explaining that people needed to be able to read traffic signs and labels on products when making purchases. These are, indeed, important applications, but limited in the scope of how reading can be applied in life beyond school and how she was applying reading outside of school. Finally, when discussing her leisure reading as well as texts she had read in school, Kai had limited terminology for discussing her reading. Instead of using the term *dystopia*, she referred to the novel *The Giver* as “that cult-like book.” As we talked, it became clear that Kai liked graphic novels and fantasy books, yet these were not terms she used or took ownership of herself.

Kai contradicted her statement, “I don’t really read a lot,” and demonstrated reader behaviors.

While Kai perceived that she did not read a lot, in truth, she did. During free time in Math, Kai chose to watch a cartoon on YouTube; instead of getting out earbuds like other students, though, Kai chose to turn on closed captioning and read the dialogue happening during the show. Kai enjoyed spending free time on Wikipedia and other sites looking for information on the history of her town and county. She was quick to take me to a place in the library where she found a book on the history of Rural Town which she read for a Social Studies project. While there, she located another book about the history of the county, browsed through some of the pictures, and determined she would check it out soon. Kai understood multiple academic applications for reading, explaining to me various texts she read in Social Studies, Math, and Science. She also pointed out that in band and choir she had to read notes, emphasizing the word *read*. Though she lacked terminology for what she read, Kai was able to express preferences, including that she liked humorous books, to name books she had read, to discuss characters in the books, and to make recommendations for reluctant readers. She also expressed her preference for reading conditions, stating that she preferred to read at home where it was quiet and preferred reading on her phone to her school-issued Chromebook.

Lisa

Lisa described herself on two separate occasions as an “okay” reader. She was quick to point out in the first interview that she did not read for fun. In the second interview, after news that the school board had voted to close Rural School to grades 7-12 after the coming school year, Lisa determined that the school played a role in shaping her reading identity. These three elements stood out as key to Lisa’s story.

Lisa saw herself as an “okay” reader.

By choosing the term “okay” to describe her reading, Lisa acknowledged that she had both skills and struggles. When asked about a time she got hooked on a book, Lisa quickly identified the *Junie B. Jones* series of books. Junie was a character that Lisa identified with: “She has my attitude. Her brother is just like my brother, and her mom is just like my mom.” Lisa was able to name reading preferences, liking books with pictures and words and wanting something exciting to read, like a book “about a murder or something,” “something to look forward to.” These statements revealed that Lisa was maturing as a reader from when she liked the *Junie B. Jones* books. While she had read books written for older readers with similar characters to Junie, they had not had the same appeal Junie once did. Lisa mentioned that she should reread a *Babysitters Club* book she had started because she lost her place and did not remember the story. This was a book Lisa’s mom purchased for her at the school book fair. In addition to the desire to finish the book, Lisa expressed interest in owning the whole series of *Babysitters Club* graphic novels and reading them in order. One reason Lisa saw herself as just “okay” was that she recognized she struggled with “big words and stuff”; however, she showed a desire to use these words in communication. She did not necessarily remember words she has encountered, like *escalator* and *catastrophe*, but wanted to use them and incorporate them into her personal vocabulary which would eventually support her reading.

Lisa did not read for fun.

The struggles Lisa had with reading likely led her to avoid doing it for fun. She told me that reading by herself, whether at school or at home, was her worst experience with reading.

Lisa stressed that when she read, she needed absolute quiet or to be reading aloud with a group. This prompted me to ask if Lisa heard her voice in her head when she read, but she did not. This absence of subvocal articulation may have been making comprehension more difficult for her. Further supporting the fact that Lisa did not read for fun was that Lisa told me she did not do much reading at home; when she did read at home, she reluctantly read to her brother his second-grade texts at her mother's prodding. She did not enjoy this activity at all; she found it repetitive and boring. In school Lisa struggled to see reading as more than technical, telling me that her teachers were "very particular on how we read" and emphasized that students be fast and accurate. Lisa also struggled to see how reading in school applied to her out-of-school experiences, mentioning only that reading in school helped her learn facts for a test. One of the biggest influencers to Lisa's not reading for fun may have been a poor elementary school experience in which she was bullied and did not receive the assistance she needed to learn to read well.

Lisa's reading identity was shaped, in part, by her small school.

Lisa transferred from Small Town Elementary School to Rural School at the beginning of her sixth-grade year. Positive experiences at Rural School led to her telling friends at Small Town Elementary about Rural School, and two of them, including Ash, transferred the following school year. With just 11 students in the seventh-grade class, Lisa got to know her peers and became comfortable with them. This allowed her to feel comfortable reading aloud in class when teachers regularly used a popcorn or round-robin reading approach. One reason Lisa changed schools was because she was aware that she was not receiving the help she needed. At Rural School, Lisa was placed in the DRI group for students with the highest need in the junior/senior high. She told me, "I'm in the lowest DRI because...I'm not bad at reading, but it's my

comprehension that they say is what I need to work on” (Interview #1). Even being aware that she did not perform in reading as well as most of her peers did not create discomfort. Instead, Lisa saw the benefit of this intervention and additional one-on-one work she did with the reading specialist: “It got a lot better at the beginning of the year. Whenever we had DRI and then after we had DRI it helped my reading and stuff, and it like improved my reading a lot the teachers said” (Interview #2). Coming to Rural School, Lisa was seeking teachers who cared about her, and she found that in the reading specialist and others who took time to answer her questions:

The teachers don’t just focus on one person. They kind of help everybody. Whoever needs the most help, they help you, but they don’t help you all the time; they try to let you figure it out. Then if you actually need help, they come back to you. (Interview #2)

This recognition of care was reflected in her own disappointment in the retirement of two teachers at the end of the school year.

Common Themes

Each student is unique and experiences constructing their reading identity in unique ways. In this study, Mrs. Beam, the Social Studies teacher, admitted that the student participants represented “an interesting cross section” (Interview #2). They were all different. Despite differences and uniquenesses, these participants did demonstrate some commonalities in describing themselves to me as readers. By organizing themes that I identified in each student’s narrative into a graphic organizer for each student (example provided in Figure 3.2) and comparing these graphic organizers, I identified two common themes. First, the student participants each had the potential to be readers. Second, all the student participants needed support in developing or maintaining positive reading identities.

Ash was a capable reader who sometimes showed a desire to interact with others over what she was reading. Charlie and Cooper were readers; they enjoyed reading. Kai was a reader who just did not perceive herself as one yet. Lisa struggled, but she enjoyed interacting over books. All of these gave evidence to the student participants' potential for beginning to or continuing to see themselves as readers.

Supports students needed to develop or maintain positive reading identities included interesting texts, opportunities to discuss reading, quiet, and choice. Ash was a capable reader who often chose not to read. She needed support in identifying books that would hook her and opportunity to build more connections with others to feel more comfortable exchanging ideas about texts. Though Charlie and Cooper saw themselves as readers, they still needed support from others. Charlie and Cooper both expressed wanting to have goals which indicated they were not at a stage where they were ready to set these for themselves; they needed help. Charlie needed quiet spaces to read and wanted choice in reading materials. Cooper recognized he needed to be interested in a topic to be engaged and successful in his reading; therefore, having someone help make connections to his interests with new reading materials would have been beneficial. Like Charlie, Kai also wanted quiet and opportunity to pursue her own interests in reading. Lisa also expressed a desire for choice. In addition to this, she demonstrated that she benefitted from the support the reading specialist provided in her DRI class.

RQ 2: How Do Middle School Students in a Rural Kansas School Experience Constructing Their Reading Identities in and outside of the School Setting?

I analyzed the individual cases and compared them to one another using a method of stacking comparable cases (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I created a matrix of common themes (Appendix D) by identifying five areas in which all students had significant experiences:

positioning, DRI experience, experiencing success, struggling, and connecting. I then placed codes from the individual data analysis process in each category for each student which allowed for cross-case. Using the resulting matrix, I identified three critical experiences these rural middle school students had in constructing their reading identities: positioning, struggling, and succeeding. The strongest of these was that of positioning.

Students experienced positioning both by the school and their own attempts to position themselves. Students also experienced struggling with reading as well as succeeding with it.

Positioning

Positions are roles that institutions assign to students or that students assign to themselves (Gee, 2000; Harré, 2012; Harré et al., 2009). In positioning a student, a school may place that student in a particular class or give the student a particular label such as gifted or struggling. Students position themselves in various ways; these may include where students situate themselves in the classroom and the postures they assume at their desks.

The student participants in this study experienced positioning themselves (self-positioning) as well as being positioned by the educational institution of the school (institutional positioning). Students positioned themselves physically in both positive and negative ways. They also positioned themselves in ways that demonstrated they were seeking autonomy or exercising their own agency. Regarding institutional positioning, the students were positioned by being placed in DRI classes based on reading scores, they were positioned for differing levels of success based on classroom structures, and they were positioned for success with access to computers, books, and teachers and with time to succeed.

Self-Positioning

The participants in this study all demonstrated acts of positioning themselves. Sometimes these were positive acts that indicated students were interested in learning and reading. Other acts were negative, showing defiance or disinterest at times. Some acts of positioning were very literal physical acts of placing themselves in particular positions in a positive or negative way. Other acts were less obvious but revealed students' desires to have autonomy.

Physical positioning

Participants physically positioned themselves in both negative and positive ways. Table 4.1 provides examples of this. For both Lisa and Ash, going to Rural School was itself an act of positive physical positioning. They did not like being bullied in their previous school and wanted to attend a school where teachers would attend to their needs and support them. Positive physical positioning also included acts of students placing themselves in positions to learn. Charlie turned toward a teacher to listen or make eye contact and moved to be closer to the Science teacher to receive instruction and avoid those who were talking and being distracting. In Science, Lisa also moved away from tablemates who were being disruptive. Ash chose on two different occasions to sit at a different table grouping in English, closer to the teacher and further from those she was inclined to talk to and be distracted by. Even in homeroom, Kai situated herself facing the teacher at the closest table which allowed her to share her reading and easily have discussions with the teacher. Cooper moved closer to his partner in Social Studies to focus on the task of creating a Kahoot together. Posture also gave evidence of positive positioning. Kai sat up to listen to the English teacher, and Cooper leaned into his computer as he worked on Lexia assignments in his reading intervention, revealing his engagement.

Table 4.1. Positive and Negative Physical Self-Positioning

RQ 2: How do rural middle school students experience constructing their reading identities in and outside of the school setting?	Participant	Sample Data Point	Patterns
	Ash	“We just stopped going to Small Town. The school there was terrible.” (Interview #1)	Positively Physically Positioning Self
		Ash sitting with different group, away from those she usually talks to, closer to teacher’s desk, has computer open and is working (Field Notes, April 29, English)	
	Charlie	Science teacher takes students on tour of construction room where materials and tools are. Charlie takes a chair closest to the teacher. (Later) Science teacher tries to get students’ attention; Charlie moves from those talking to be near the Science teacher. (Field Notes, April 6, Science)	
	Cooper	Cooper moves closer to Ash to work—Creating a Kahoot (Field Notes, March 3, Social Studies)	
		Cooper is working, leans into his computer, watching a Lexia video (Field Notes, April 6, DRI)	
	Kai	Kai sits up and follows more as the English teacher tells more of the story of ancient Greece and mythology (Field Notes, March 2, English)	
		Kai sits at the table closest the teacher, faces front/teacher, discusses what is reading on Wikipedia (Field Notes, March 2, Homeroom)	
	Lisa	“The teachers did not help you, and I was always failing, so we moved over here ‘cause this is where my dad went to school, and he said they had better teachers and that they cared about our grades. So, we moved.” (Interview #1)	Negatively Physically Positioning Self
		Lisa is upset at a student. The Science teacher suggests one of them move since they are sitting at the same table. Lisa moves. (Field Notes, March 9, Science)	
	Ash	Ash has her back turned to teacher table, board, and screen (Research Journal, March 11, Science)	
		Ash not working, sitting with back to wall, sideways in chair, looking around room (Field Notes, March 25, Math)	
	Charlie	Charlie continues turning to student to talk; sprays cleaner on another student’s desk mid-lesson; moving his desk with another student; up in center of room, asks where tissues are, uses this as chance to see what I write (Field Notes, February 18, English)	
	Cooper	Cooper sitting in back corner, back to wall, friend next to him, also back to wall...appears to be playing video game. (Field Notes, March 23, English)	
	Kai	Mrs. Davis discusses summary of story; Kai has her book on her head (Field Notes, March 2, English)	
	Lisa	Secretary tells Lisa to leave gym and go to music classroom; Lisa stands up, turns around, and sits back down. (Field Notes, May 11, Science Fair)	
		Social Studies teacher assigned reading pages 158-161 silently. Lisa is picking her nails with her book open. Shortly after her head is down. (Field Notes, March 11, Social Studies)	

Note. This table displays the strongest examples of each participant’s positively and negatively positioning themselves in class.

Students' negative positioning revealed when they were disengaged with content or even being defiant. Examples of participants' negative positioning are provided in table 4.1. At one point, Kai, who was usually attentive and focused in class, had her textbook on top of her head as the English teacher summarized the story the class had just read. Charlie, who wanted to please his teachers but also struggled to stay focused, would occasionally walk around classrooms and even sprayed a classmate's desk with cleaner in the middle of lessons. Cooper sat at the back of most classes, when he could, with his computer facing away from his teacher and me so that we could not see that he was playing video games. Both Ash and Lisa showed tendencies to avoid classroom work. Twice I was asked to retrieve one or both of them from the restroom after a lengthy absence from the classroom. In Social Studies, Ash drew on her hand instead of taking a test while Lisa picked at her fingernails and put her head down when she was supposed to be reading silently. While Kai's negative positioning was likely a result of boredom from the teacher's summarizing what Kai already knew, and Charlie's negative positioning was likely a result of his distractable nature, Cooper, Lisa, and Ash may have been more trying to push the limits or may even have defiant in their actions. Lisa's avoiding class and putting her head down instead of reading may have come, in part, from her struggles to read, especially to read silently. Lisa's defiance in the gym when the secretary instructed her to go to the music classroom may have been because of her own insecurity; she was receiving attention from upperclassmen and was likely staying in order to keep receiving that attention. Ash's avoidance is harder to analyze. Her defiance in math and choosing to sit sideways in her chair and look around the room instead of doing her homework was likely a result of her attitude that she is good at math and believes she should be placed in a more challenging class. While she believed she was a good reader, however, she also demonstrated at times an inclination to struggle. This possible struggle could

have related to her delays in returning from restroom breaks or writing on her hand instead of completing a test in Social Studies.

Seeking autonomy

An unexpected finding was how students used positioning to seek or exercise autonomy in the classroom. Table 4.2 shows some of my observations that I identified as students exercising their agency and seeking autonomy. Many of these moves in exercising agency are physical acts, similar to those listed in the above sections. However, there is evidence that students are also working to establish themselves as learners and even readers.

In Social Studies, students were given an opportunity to choose where they sat for reading the chapter aloud as a class. Both Ash and Kai chose to sit on the floor. This may seem like an insignificant act, but in few classes did such an opportunity exist. In interviews, participants expressed preferences for comfortable places to read. Choosing to sit on the floor could have been a way Ash and Kai were identifying what was comfortable to them and exercising some autonomy that existed in few other places during the school day. Charlie exercised his autonomy by choosing to utilize extra review time in Science and choosing not to utilize the resource room during Social Studies. The first act positioned him as a dedicated learner in the eyes of his teacher. The second act positioned him as an increasingly independent student. While Charlie still utilized the resource room for Math and some projects, having the ability to choose gave him some autonomy over his learning and potentially some control over how others may view him as a student designated to receive special education resources. Cooper's autonomous move, moving his chair to avoid being pestered by a classmate, demonstrated he was independent and capable of solving his own problems. He also demonstrated a desire to learn in removing the distraction.

Table 4.2. Exercising Agency through Positioning

RQ 2: How do rural middle school students experience constructing their reading identities in and outside of the school setting?	Participant	Sample Data Point
	Ash	Textbook out, Ash chooses to sit on the floor to read (Field Notes, April 28, Social Studies)
		Ash sitting with different group, away from those she usually talks to, closer to teacher's desk, has computer open and is working (Field Notes, April 29, English)
	Charlie	Mrs. Spade gives students option to review information or take exit ticket quiz; Charlie reviews (Field Notes, March 3, Science)
		Charlie stays to take test here instead of in resource room. (Field Notes, March 11, Social Studies)
	Cooper	The student behind Cooper is pestering him. Cooper finally says, "Quit kicking my chair." Cooper moves his chair. (Field Notes, March 11, Social Studies)
	Kai	Textbook out, Kai chooses to sit on floor to read (Field Notes, April 28, Social Studies)
	Lisa	Lisa sets up table. Later she finishes table and taping image on. Tech teacher says, "I don't want to burst your bubble, Lisa. It isn't straight and needs to be moved up." Lisa responds, "OK." She does not argue or express frustration. (Research Journal, April 27, Media Technology)

Note. This table displays the strongest examples of each participant's positioning themselves as a demonstration of autonomy or exercise of agency.

I was most interested in Lisa's act of positioning. In Media Technology, the teacher gave the class a lengthy list of tasks that needed to be accomplished that period. A few students received particular tasks; others were left to identify how they could contribute to the class's efforts. Lisa engaged in several tasks without being told explicitly what to do. With one task, a large glass jar broke. Rather than getting upset, as I had seen her do in other classes, Lisa quickly went to work cleaning up the mess. Later she took the initiative to find paper to cover a table that would be used as a kind of anchor desk for a broadcast the class would be producing. When the teacher pointed out that the image of an animal on the front of the table was crooked and too low, Lisa again did not complain but immediately set about fixing the problem. The interaction with her teacher is detailed in Table 4.2. With these actions, Lisa could position herself as a problem solver and positive contributor to the class. I did not always see evidence of this kind of

positioning from Lisa, but she told me in her second interview, “I like Media Technology because it’s hands on. We don’t just sit there and do nothing. We’re always up doing something.” Liking the class and having physical activity to engage in seemed to make Lisa more inclined to position herself in a positive way.

Institutional Positioning

The educational institution of the school played a role in positioning the students. These acts of positioning were a result of school structures, teacher decisions, and administrative decisions. Positioning students experienced coming from the institution included placement in their DRI classes based on reading scores, classroom structures like seating arrangements that could help or hinder their learning, and access they had to various resources and time to succeed.

Differentiated Reading Instruction classes

Many elementary schools provide some system of tiered support for struggling students. Called Response to Intervention (RTI) or Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) these structures are designed to utilize assessment to drive targeted intervention instruction for struggling students, primarily in math and reading. Because not all students receive the support they need in early grades, intervention programs are becoming more common at the middle and high school levels. At Rural School, all students in the junior/senior high school were assigned to Differentiated Reading Instruction (DRI) classes that met for 75 minutes every other day. Group assignments were based on students’ scores on reading screeners given at multiple points in the year. The assessments were administered by the reading specialist who also assigned students to their groups and selected which teachers, including those who do not primarily teach reading in their content areas, would work with which students. The reading specialist then provided each teacher with packets and novels for novel study. The packets included a range of questions that

dealt with vocabulary, character development, and events in the novels. In classes I witnessed, students typically read the novels aloud in a “popcorn” or “round-robin” style with the teachers also participating in the read aloud. In one class, the teacher read the book aloud to the students. Because the teachers leading the interventions were not all trained as reading teachers, their guidance of discussion in the class varied. The athletic director paused from time to time to ask the students what they thought of the book, the setting, characters, and predictions. The math teacher, on the other hand, did not discuss the book with students but had them reading for practically the entire 75 minutes. The group with the lowest scores spent the first half of class working individually on the Lexia program online before reading their book together.

Because the DRI classes were determined by assessment performance and assigned by the reading specialist who represented the institution of the school, these groupings could have been seen as institutional positioning, something that can be difficult for students to overcome as they strive to position themselves in their own image. For Lisa, being positioned in the lowest group actually was perceived by her as a benefit. This benefit was evident in the growth teachers were noting and commenting on in other classes. Lisa also enjoyed the opportunity to read aloud that the small class provided. Ash, however, struggled with her position in her DRI class filled with high school students, where she was the only middle school student. While this act of positioning by the school institution may have affirmed her thoughts that she was a good reader, the placement itself took away Ash’s autonomy. Other struggles that she faced indicated a possibility that Ash needed more support than she was receiving with this more advanced group. Kai struggled with her DRI class, as well. She did not enjoy reading aloud and did not volunteer to read in this class. Kai also shared her dislike for the teacher and did not connect with other

students in the class to feel comfortable discussing what she read. She did, however, remember the books the group had read together.

Classroom structures

An interesting form of institutional positioning for student success happened within classroom management structures. In Science and English, students were allowed to choose their seats. This often meant that students chose to sit next to those with whom they enjoyed talking. Once in these groupings, students were more likely to use their phones to listen to music or scroll TikToks. Noise levels would often rise to a point where teachers would threaten to move students but not ever follow through on that threat. Charlie, Lisa, and Kai all complained about the noise in their classes and how it made their reading difficult. Without structures to better facilitate content engagement, students were more inclined to become distracted and loud.

In Math, students seemed to be better positioned for success. They were spread out throughout the room, assigned to individual chairs that faced the teacher and white board. When Ash expressed difficulty seeing the board, the teacher moved her to the front of the room so that she could see better. From the silence in the room, it was clear students understood the expectation to only talk with permission. This setting, though, did not allow students much autonomy. The positioning for success was a result of the teacher's doing, not that of the students. It is possible, then, that Ash's losing her math textbook twice may have been, in a way, her exercising her own autonomy in a restrictive environment.

Mrs. Beam chose to have round tables in her Social Studies classroom that would help facilitate student discussion which she engaged table groups and the whole class in regularly. Additionally, she utilized assigned seats. It appeared that occasionally she would seat friends together to allow them to support one another, but when talking became too much for repeated

class periods, she assigned new seats to create an environment more conducive to learning. Not all seats were ideal, as Charlie was seated in a position that required him to turn around to engage with the class in discussion. This seating, though, allowed him to exercise his autonomy and position himself for learning. During one observation, Mrs. Beam gave students an option to choose where they sat to read the textbook chapter aloud. This choice included sitting on the floor, which Ash and Kai took advantage of. A structure that allowed for the teacher to help position students as learners but also allowed students to position themselves seemed successful in that students were less likely to position themselves negatively in Social Studies than their other classes.

Computers, access, and time to succeed

Schools play a significant role in how they position students for success, not just in labels but in other resources provided to situate students for success. Rural school took many steps in these areas to positively position students to be successful learners and potentially successful readers. Prior to my arrival, each student had use of a laptop computer that they checked out each morning and checked in each afternoon before leaving. Charlie's petition led to a change in policy that allowed middle school students to take their laptops home each night, allowing students to complete homework on the computer at home. For students with internet access at home, this gave students access to the gradebook system PowerSchool and teachers' Google Classrooms so they could see assignments that were missing as well as upcoming and make submissions. One day in English, Mrs. Davis piloted an online curriculum, introducing the possibility of using curriculum updated beyond the collection of literature texts in her classroom published in 2000. The online curriculum allowed students to interact with the text by highlighting and annotating.

The library provided access to books that gave students opportunity to see themselves as readers. Both Cooper and Lisa mentioned in their first interviews that they had purchased books at the book fair earlier in the school year. This opportunity for book ownership helped them position themselves as readers. While not staffed with a full-time certified librarian, the library staff regularly interacted with students as they came in, making the library feel like an accessible space. Charlie visited with one library assistant about his book that he wrote. She recommended he needed paragraphs, which he added before publishing. Publishing meant printing the story with a cover page, stapling it together, and creating a poster advertisement that he was allowed to post on the library door (Figure 4.1). Library staff allowed him to keep his book there for others to view. This access for Charlie validated him as a writer and allowed others access to his book. Cooper read a portion of Charlie's story one day when he came in with a group of boys who were waiting on the printer. In her first interview, Lisa explained that the library allowed students to check out two books. Near the end of the school year, when Mrs. Davis announced students needed to return books to the library, Lisa had Roll with It. Kai was excited to show me where the books with local history were located in the library during her first interview. While Ash did not use the library for accessing books, it did give her a safe space to be away from others when she was having a hard time.

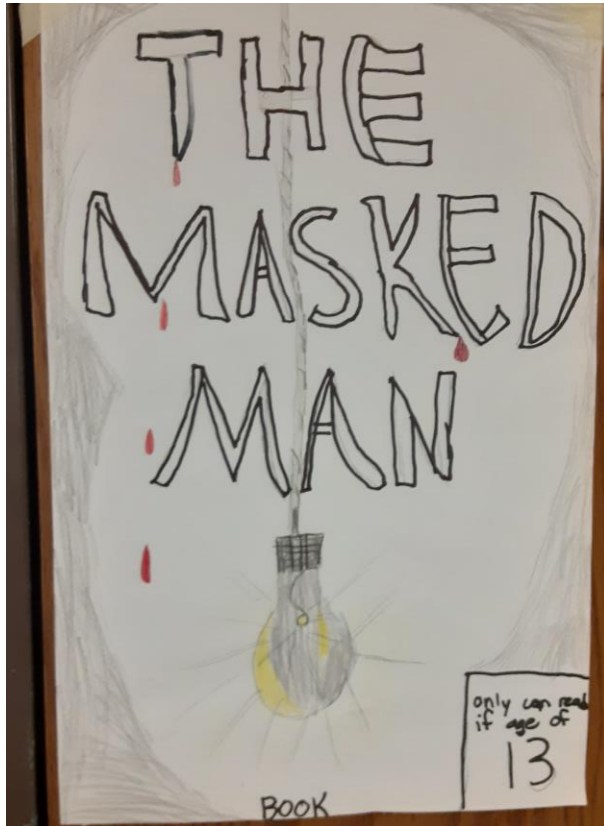


Figure 4.1. Charlie's book advertisement on the library door

Students had time to access the library, as well. The junior/senior high schedule was structured so that each day began with homeroom time. From 8:00 to 8:27, students could grab breakfast, work on homework, access the library, get help from teachers, or use the time any other way they needed. Additionally, the dedicated time from 11:03 to 12:18 every other day for reading intervention also supported students' abilities to perceive themselves as readers. For Lisa, especially, this time was valuable in allowing her an opportunity to improve her reading skills and to read aloud and discuss with others what she was reading. The time may not have had the same impact on others. Though Charlie's skills did improve so that he moved up a level, the next class was not as engaging to him. Kai struggled to see herself as a reader, even though

she could name or describe books her DRI class had read. The reading aloud round-robin or popcorn style that most classes utilized added to her struggle.

Struggling

All of the participants showed some form of struggle with school, reading and constructing their reading identity. Students demonstrated lacking confidence, being unprepared or having incomplete assignments, and avoiding class work. Examples of these are given in Table 4.3. All participants shared common struggles in demonstrating that they lacked confidence either in reading itself or some other aspect of school. All of the participants except for Kai experienced being unprepared or having incompletes; and, with the exception of Charlie, all of the participants demonstrated some avoidance of reading or other classroom tasks.

Lacking Confidence

Examples of how each of the student participants demonstrated a lack of confidence are outlined in Table 4.3. Charlie and Lisa were both concerned with what others thought of them. When she first started wearing glasses, Lisa was concerned with the impact they had on her appearance. That first day Lisa asked at least three people what they thought of her glasses. Each time she received a positive response, but she was resistant to the compliments. Charlie was more concerned with how his teachers perceived him as a person and a learner. Charlie said that he told Mrs. Davis that the book she had just finished reading aloud in DRI was a good book even though he did not really like it, “Just to make her happy. Sometimes I get really bad grades in her class, so you just gotta say something to make her happy” (Interview #1).

Table 4.3. Signs of Struggle

RQ 2: How do rural middle school students experience constructing their reading identities?		Sample Data Point	Pattern
	Ash	"I don't like reading aloud, ever...It's scary. Especially in a group of people...like when I'm reading to the class, my voice is really shaky, and I'm like, (puff, puff) 'When am I going to be done with this?' Even if it's just in my own class, like the seventh graders. It's like, I know you people really well. I know you won't make fun of me. But my brain, something tells me that you will. I just don't read." (Interview #1)	Lacking Confidence
	Charlie	Me: "How good of a reader do you think you are?" Charlie: "I don't know. I really don't." (Interview #1)	
		"People don't usually care about what I read." (Interview #1)	
	Cooper	Mrs. Davis talking to Cooper. Cooper: "Did I spell it wrong? I give up." (Field Notes, May 5, English)	
		Mrs. Spade: "What makes a good poster?" Showing them an example. Cooper: "It has words." Mrs. Spade: "What do you mean?" Cooper: "Don't know, readable. Sums it up. I don't know." (Field Notes, April 28, Science)	
	Kai	"No. I do not feel comfortable (reading aloud)...Plus I also get made fun of for having a lower voice than all of the other girls." (Interview #2)	Being Unprepared or Having Incompletes
	Lisa	"Did you see my glasses? (asks of para) Para responds, "Nice." Lisa: "I don't like them. They make me look stupid." (Research Journal, March 23, Media Technology)	
	Ash	"We won't need our math books today, right? I'm gonna get another detention. I don't have my stuff for math." (Research Journal, March 11, Science)	
	Charlie	2:35 Charlie asks to get head phones—his packet for FACS kitchen safety is at home—2:40 Teacher says handbook is due Friday—finish now—Charlie is on computer—he's not working—3:05 C—I can't find it (handbook document) (Research Journal, March 30, FACS)	
	Cooper	10:25 Students turn in 10 facts & Questions p. 170--D to printer; 10:31 3 back to get computers to print & exit—includes Cooper (missed 13 minutes of class) (Research Journal, March 25, Social Studies)	
		FACS teacher asks, "Does everyone have this page?" holds page up—Cooper: "Mine's in my locker." (Research Journal, March 30, FACS)	Avoiding
	Lisa	"I don't know what they're doing (in PE). I don't like PE at all. And I didn't bring clothes today because... So I'll get a detention. Yeah." (Lisa, Interview #1)	
	Ash	During test: 10:02 Ash—writing on hand; 10:07 drawing on fingers; 10:10 writing on hand—maybe has answered one question (Research Journal, March 11, Social Studies)	
	Cooper	Mrs. Spade instructs class to work on poster, video or build; Cooper is playing with Newton's Cradle on teacher's desk; Friend looking through background papers—says he found a baseball one; Cooper is slow to come over. (Research Journal, April 28, Science)	
	Kai	"Yeah, I don't like reading or volunteering. (Quick to correct.) Well, I mean I do like reading sometimes. I just don't like volunteering." (Kai, Interview #2)	
	Lisa	10:55 Asks to go to counselor. 11:00 Class ends—Mrs. Grace wonders why Lisa hasn't come back. Finds out counselor is not in his office. Goes to office to find Lisa. Lisa is not in office now (not sure if ever was). (Research Journal, March 9, Social Studies)	
		Lisa stretching, watching me, picking nails with pencil during test (Research Journal, March 11, Social Studies)	

Note. This table displays the strongest examples of each participant's experiencing struggling with reading and school.

Charlie went on to explain that he did the same in greeting Mr. Broadfoot each day in Math. Charlie was very concerned about Math and regularly asked me to observe that class in hopes that Mr. Broadfoot would be nicer as a result of my presence. Charlie feared giving the wrong response and upsetting the teacher, though I never observed him answer incorrectly and even observed the teacher joking with him. Charlie also demonstrated his uncertainty in he shared that he did not know how good of a reader he was and thought that people were not interested in what he read. For Lisa, academic lack of confidence was not as evident; she wanted opportunities to read aloud and was not hesitant to ask questions to complete assignments. When she discussed reading at home, however, it was evident that she felt debased to read to her brother his second-grade reading materials which were repetitive and below her age level, though not far below her reading level. Kai and Ash both felt uncomfortable reading aloud. They had both been made fun of in the past, Ash for her shaky voice and Kai for her low voice. Though both were fluent readers, reading aloud, an activity that was common in DRI, English, and Social Studies, weakened their confidence in themselves as readers. Cooper's struggle with confidence was not always obvious. He easily discussed reading in his interview and seemed to exercise quite a bit of autonomy in his classes. However, close analysis of his comments during classes started to reveal some potential holes in that shell. He was quick to give up in English when he thought he was wrong and did not understand the task at hand. In Science, Cooper was capable of giving a correct response to Mrs. Spade's question, but he immediately expressed doubt in himself and his answer.

Being Unprepared/Having Incompletes

Ash, Charlie, Cooper, and Lisa all experienced being unprepared or having incomplete assignments. Examples of these are outlined in Table 4.3. In March, Ash lost her bag containing

the second math book that she had been issued that school year and all completed math assignments. Mr. Broadfoot required students to keep their completed assignments in a notebook that he checked and gave points for. Losing this would impact her grade. Ash was also very aware of the impact it would have on how Mr. Broadfoot perceived her as a student. Charlie regularly struggled with locating the proper assignments needed in school. Often Mrs. Ford or the special education paras were able to help him locate papers and stay organized, but when he failed to bring work back from home, he was more likely to flounder. Even given the opportunity in FACS to locate online the assignment he left at home, Charlie was distracted and more interested in watching videos than locating and completing his work. Cooper's lack of preparedness resulted in lost instruction time, as he had to spend time printing in the library or going to his locker to locate work. Lisa's being unprepared was connected to her inclination to avoid some classes and types of work. Her being unprepared was most obvious in PE. She did not have gym clothes on the day of her first interview and wanted to meet with me instead. This was one class she avoided most. She told me in her first interview that PE was boring and the teacher was mean.

Avoiding

Except for Charlie, all participants showed some level of avoidance of class work or reading itself. Examples of these are outlined in Table 4.3. For Ash and Lisa these were more obvious behaviors of looking around the room or picking at fingers or writing on hands during tests or work time in class. Both also took long restroom breaks that sometimes warranted my being asked to retrieve them from the restroom. Lisa's avoidance of classes resulted in her being more closely watched by teachers. Despite both expressing that they liked the school they attended, both showed resistance to doing the work that was required there and avoidance of

even being in classes. For Cooper, avoidance came in the form of moving slowly to start a task. In English class, he regularly avoided work by loaning his charger to a peer so that he could claim his computer battery was low and he could not work. Kai avoided volunteering to read aloud in class as much as she could, especially in DRI. Her quiet nature and not asking questions resulted in her not always comprehending information and teachers not always recognizing this lack of comprehension, as Mrs. Davis explained in her second interview.

Succeeding

The student participants experienced success when showing leadership and helping others, receiving teacher validation, engaging in classroom discussions, and reading and writing independently. The successes student participants experienced were much more unique to the individuals. There were some similarities, but even then, the similarities tended to look different among participants. Areas in which there was the most overlap in signs of success included showing leadership and helping others, receiving teacher validation, engaging in discussion, and reading or writing independently.

Showing Leadership and Helping Others

When provided with opportunities to lead, each student participant took advantage in their own unique way. Examples of their leadership efforts are outlined in Table 4.5. Ash did not show many signs of success. However, she did enjoy having the opportunity to run a Kahoot review she had created with Cooper on Mrs. Beam's computer. She was also able to help Lisa catch up from an absence. Lisa, in turn, helped Ash as the class prepared for the science fair. Lisa's ability to lead and help came from her understanding of the tasks at hand and concepts she had learned. For Charlie, opportunities came in the form of group work. He struggled with his group to keep others on task, but in Social Studies the work mattered to him, and he worked hard

to keep others from talking and tried to elicit discussion. Cooper and Kai shared leadership of their group in their Family and Consumer Science class when they were recording a kitchen safety video together. They took turns instructing others in what to do during the video. When working with a group in Social Studies, I observed Kai's group members hover around her as she began creating a Kahoot the group would later present.

Table 4.4. Signs of Success: Showing Leadership and Helping Others

RQ 2: How do rural middle school students experience constructing their reading identities in and outside of the school setting?	Participant	Sample Data Point
	Ash	Lisa: "Is this what you did when I was gone? What pages are they so I know what to do?" Mrs. Beam explains the assignment is on Google Classroom; Ash tells Lisa what to do. (Field Notes, March 25, Social Studies)
		Ash runs Kahoot review she created with Cooper on Mrs. Beam's computer. Class logs on to join. (Field Notes, March 9, Social Studies)
	Charlie	Charlie writes for his group, tells one member to shut up, member says, "I'm giving you a disadvantage." Charlie says, "Not now," to another. (Field Notes, March 25, Social Studies)
	Cooper	Kai and Cooper's group records their kitchen safety video. Kai and Cooper take charge, instructing others what to do. (Field Notes, March 30, FACS)
	Kai	Kai and Cooper's group records their kitchen safety video. Kai and Cooper take charge, instructing others what to do. (Field Notes, March 30, FACS)
		Mrs. Beam instructs groups to develop 12 review questions over their assigned section. Kai's tablemates hover around her—she is creating a Kahoot. (Field Notes, March 3, Social Studies)
	Lisa	Lisa helping Ash, asks if Ash's design log is done, asking questions to help Ash know what should go in each section: "Was it too short? What would you change?" (Field Notes, May 11, Science Fair Study Hall)

Note. This table displays the strongest examples of each participant's experiencing success in showing leadership and/or helping others.

Receiving Teacher Validation

Three participants, Cooper, Kai and Lisa, clearly received affirmation from their teachers that they were succeeding. These are outlined in Table 4.5. Cooper received a tangible reward in the form of candy for his test performance. Intangible rewards seemed more common, though. He received praise for a decision to share his candy, and he also received acknowledgment that

his interviewing skills were superior to a peer's skills in Media Technology. This second acknowledgment resulted in another reward, the opportunity to announce the upcoming powerlifting event with an eighth grader. For Kai, the opportunity to discuss her research with Mrs. Beam seemed to be enough reward. In their discussion, Mrs. Beam further validated the value of her reading and thinking by commenting on Kai's clever idea that a house in a ghost town may have a basement because it was originally a dugout. As a struggling reader placed in the lowest intervention group, Lisa's receiving comments from her teachers about her noticeable growth in her reading skills made a difference in how she perceived the intervention. Additionally, Mrs. Beam's praise of her problem solving supported the positive aspects of her independent nature.

Table 4.5. Signs of Success: Receiving Teacher Validation

RQ 2: How do rural middle school students experience constructing their reading identities in and outside of the school setting?	Participant	Sample Data Point
	Cooper	Cooper turns in his test and receives a treat (M&Ms) for having the best test score. He shares them with the class, including Mrs. Beam and me. Mrs. Beam praises his choice. (Field Notes, March 11, Social Studies)
		Mrs. Ford: "Cooper is a good interviewer; I don't see that from you (another student)." (Field Notes, March 23, Media Technology)
	Kai	Kai looking at Wikipedia, found information on ghost town in the county, shares more of what she is learning with Mrs. Beam (Positioned so facing front/teacher). Kai shares pic of house in the town with Mrs. Beam. It has a basement. Mrs. Beam says is unusual but could be for tornado shelter or keeping cool in hot summer. Kai says could have been built on a dugout. Mrs. Beam acknowledges clever thinking. (Field Notes, March 2, Homeroom)
	Lisa	"And it (DRI) like improved my reading a lot the teachers said...just the ones that, like any of the ones we read with. They could like tell that it was getting better." (Interview #2)
		Lisa's partner is out, and Lisa can't finish the project because she can't reach the partner and the project is on the partner's computer. Lisa determines the solution is to get her partner's computer from the library and copy over the information to her computer. Mrs. Beam praises solution. (Research Journal, March 9, Social Studies)

Note. This table displays the strongest examples of Cooper, Kai, and Lisa experiencing success in receiving teacher validation. Similar examples were not documented for Ash or Charlie.

Engaging in Discussion

All participants demonstrated success through opportunities to engage in discussion in the classroom. These are outlined in Table 4.6. Most of these examples came from Social Studies where Mrs. Beam provided multiple opportunities each class period for students to engage in discussion around different topics. Ash was able to use an opportunity to discuss to reveal that she had been listening and noting details in the CNN10 video; she also likely connected what she was learning with family, since she still had family in California. Charlie usually tried to participate in Social Studies discussions, though Mrs. Beam did not always call on him. In discussing billionaires, he was excited to confirm and add his own knowledge about Benjamin Franklin. For Cooper, Science is where his discussions connected to the overall content most. Here, he was able to display his knowledge of previous experiments as well as have the confidence to joke with the teacher when discussing what was living. In discussing current events in Social Studies, he typically focused on sports scores. Kai tended to pull articles that others did not notice in the regular class opening task of locating and sharing a current event. She did not always provide sufficient information in her opening summary of what she read, but with Mrs. Beam's encouragement and extra time, she was able to provide more details to demonstrate she understood what she was reading. Lisa took advantage in any class of any opportunity to discuss anything, whether academic or not. Lisa often wanted to have answers to questions teachers and classmates asked, but she did not always have the knowledge to answer. In the example in Table 4.5, she was excited to explore the Biltmore Estate online and share what she was finding with the teacher and the class. The open-ended task allowed her to participate.

Table 4.6. Signs of Success: Engaging in Discussion

RQ 2: How do rural middle school students experience constructing their reading identities in and outside of the school setting?	Participant	Sample Data Point
	Ash	Mrs. Beam pauses CNN10 to discuss pipeline issue & high fuel prices. Ash comments on California prices being higher (restating what was in video—also family connection). (Field Notes, March 25, Social Studies)
	Charlie	Billionaire discussion prompts a lot of interaction. Charlie wants to jump in; he looks up Ben Franklin’s worth in 1785-\$1 million. Richest American at the time. (Field Notes, April 28, Social Studies)
	Cooper	Mrs. Spade: “What did we discuss many moons ago?” Student: “Diffusion.” Cooper explains lab used to study diffusion. (Field Notes, March 3, Science)
		Mrs. Spade: “I have on the board a living thing.” Cooper: “It’s not living, you drew it with your hand.” (Field Notes, March 25, Science)
	Kai	Mrs. Beam: “Find your own current event to share.” Kai—Article about Ukraine—hard to teach in Utah (doesn’t go into detail). Mrs. Beam: “Read back through and see why it is difficult.” Kai—The article about Ukraine & teaching in Utah, has to do with the misinformation out there. (Field Notes, March 3, Social Studies)
	Lisa	Mrs. Beam: “I want you to google Biltmore.” Lisa pulls up floor plan. Mrs. Beam: “How much square footage?” Lisa: “That’s a big number! Ms. Beam, I am watching a video showing the sitting area. There’s lots of chairs!” (Field Notes, April 28, Social Studies)

Note. This table displays the strongest examples of each participant’s experiencing success in engaging in discussion in class.

Reading and Writing Independently

School structures did not give much incentive for reading and writing beyond what was expected for a grade in core classes. However, Charlie chose to write independently, and Kai chose to read independently beyond class expectation. Examples of their doing so are outlined in Table 4.7. Charlie enjoyed writing. He was excited to share with me the plot line of his story that was in progress when I interviewed him for the second time. Shortly thereafter he printed his book, made it available in the library to read, and created a poster to advertise it. The writing of this story and several others that he described to me were not part of any class assignment, just something he enjoyed doing. Kai enjoyed spending free time at school doing extra independent research. Often this was during Homeroom when all homework was complete. At the beginning of the research study Kai was interested in the history of her county and was investigating nearby

ghost towns. By the time I conducted the second interview, her interests had shifted with the season to tornadoes and hurricanes.

Table 4.7. Signs of Success: Reading and Writing Independently

RQ 2: How do rural middle school students experience constructing their reading identities in and outside of the school setting?	Participant	Sample Data Point
	Charlie	“In fact, I’m writing a story of my own, and it’s a horror story... It’s literally on my computer. I have one I wrote about Zeus. It’s called ‘The Falling of Olympus.’ I’ve got ‘The Rural Town Killer.’ I’ve got a story I wrote in fourth grade which somehow I scared a kid. It’s called ‘The Maid’... There’s another one, I haven’t worked on it for a long time but it’s called ‘The Titanic Killer.’ It’s Jack the Ripper, kinda...I’ve written a lot of stories.” (Interview #2)
	Kai	Carrie: “Can you think of any other kinds of reading that you do in school?” Kai: “Uh, Wikipedia articles. That’s mainly about tornados or hurricanes, just random stuff.” Carrie: “That’s the stuff you do for fun?” Kai: “Um, hm. Yeah.” Carrie: “You don’t have any classes studying hurricanes and tornadoes, do you?” Kai: “No. I want a class that does that. But then I probably have to wait until next year.” (Interview #2)

Note. This table displays the strongest examples of Charlie and Kai experiencing success in reading and writing independently. Other participants did not display the same interest in these activities.

RQ 3: What Role Does the Educational Environment Play in Shaping Rural Kansas Middle School Students’ Reading Identities?

To answer this third question, I considered the data presented previously under the first two research sub-questions along with data collected in teacher participant interviews and additional data collected throughout the study. Four themes clearly identified the role of the educational environment in shaping students’ reading identities: elementary reading experiences, the conflict between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, the ways in which the school supported reading, and a struggle to provide foundational instruction while maintaining rigor.

Creating Positive Elementary Experiences

Elementary experiences seemed to play an important role in developing readers. Both Charlie and Cooper described positive experiences in elementary school, especially surrounding reading, and both described themselves as readers. Both had spent their entire education at Rural School and benefitted from reading experiences in earlier grades. Kai, though she spent most of her elementary education in Rural School, spent some time at another school where she had some negative experiences. Kai was less likely to see herself as a reader than Charlie and Cooper. Both Ash and Lisa transferred to Rural School after having negative experiences at Small Town School. Neither was inclined to see herself as a reader, this despite the fact that Ash had strong reading abilities and Lisa was improving in hers.

Fostering Intrinsic over Extrinsic Motivation

Mr. Broadfoot mentioned in his first interview a desire to see students become more motivated and accountable. He felt that elementary “hand holding” led students to be too dependent on teachers for help and not reliant on themselves. However, both Charlie and Cooper, who had positive reading experiences in elementary school, expressed a desire for goal setting that they had experienced in elementary school. This told me there was a path forward for creating more authentic, intrinsically motivating experiences for students.

The elementary school utilized the Accelerated Reader (AR) program from Renaissance Learning. Often in this program students set goals of number of points they will earn by reading books and taking electronic tests on them. Students who reach their goals at the end of the allotted time are often rewarded with parties or prizes (Smith & Westberg, 2011). While Charlie did mention that he enjoyed these, for both boys, the goal setting and opportunity to reach goals was most important. However, there were few opportunities for the student participants to set

goals and work toward them in seventh grade. In most classes, work was assigned by teachers and expected to be completed. In DRI, whole classes were assigned texts and read them together, which was not the same as leisurely reading and setting a personal goal for how many pages or books would be read.

Table 4.9 shows how extrinsic and intrinsic motivation play a role for students and teachers at Rural School. Students may even seem to be conditioned to expect rewards. Charlie represented the impact of a focus on grades for students in seventh grade at Rural School. Students were regularly checking their grades, seeing if their grades were up, and seeing, as in Charlie's case, if they were eligible for surprises and prizes. Cooper remembered prizes he received for reading in elementary school. Mr. Broadfoot mentioned that students chose not to complete assignments when they were due but then would ask for extra credit. This, too, was a kind of extrinsic motivator, detracting from the motivation to complete tasks correctly and on time. Mrs. Davis incentivized reading with the promise of a movie. She also "bribed" the seventh graders to complete their work with the promise of homemade cinnamon rolls. Both Mrs. Davis and Mrs. Spade noted that students often completed assignments and wanted recognition from their teachers. These kinds of extrinsic rewards replace students' choosing to accomplish tasks for their own satisfaction.

Table 4.8. Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation in Rural School

RQ 3: What role does the educational environment play in shaping rural Kansas middle school students' reading identities?	Participant	Sample Data Point	Pattern
	Charlie	"Is that (intercom announcement) today, the big prize they announced? ...I just want to make sure I got my grades up." (Interview #1)	Extrinsic Motivation
	Cooper	"I liked fourth grade reading because you like had a goal you had to reach to go to this fun party." (Interview #1)	
	Mr. Broadfoot	Some students don't do more than show up, then they ask for extra credit. (Paraphrasing from Interview #1)	
	Mrs. Davis	"They wanted something that had a movie so that there was an incentive to read if they could watch the movie later." (Interview #1)	
		"I assigned this little bit. I said, 'If you guys can get this done, I will bring homemade cinnamon rolls.' Maybe if I bribe them, because every other incentive has failed with them." (Interview #1)	
	Mrs. Spade	"Some of them really want that guidance or instant gratification, or they want me to see that they've done something. So they want recognition that they've done it." (Interview #1)	
	Mrs. Ford	"They are very proud when they know how to do things and can show their classmates how to do things on their computer." (Email, May 8)	Intrinsic Motivation
		"They are more confident in quickly googling how to do something and then showing their classmates." (Email, May 8)	
		"Students take pride in the fact that they make adjustments without asking." (Email, May 8)	
	Mrs. Spade	"That internal drive amongst your peers, you want to be the person that's proving that you're worthy of getting that spot (on the Science Olympiad team) because you're gonna do the work." (Interview #1)	

Note. This table displays the strongest examples of teachers or students discussing extrinsic or intrinsic motivation.

Opportunities for building intrinsic motivation did exist at Rural School. Mrs. Ford taught the Media Technology course. This group of middle school students was responsible for filming sporting events and other projects for Rural School staff. The activities in the class, then, were hands-on and authentic learning opportunities. Mrs. Ford pointed out that the class helped students develop a sense of pride for their work and gave them an opportunity to share their knowledge with peers. Mrs. Spade took advantage of the knowledge of Media Technology students in her Science classes when she would ask these students to help other students with a

task, like creating a folder in Google Drive. Mrs. Ford also commented that “Students take pride in the fact that they make adjustments without asking” (Email, May 8). Lisa demonstrated this twice in Media Technology one day, once when a glass jug being moved broke and she immediately moved to cleaning up the pieces and again when the dragon she had taped on the front of a table needed to be straightened out and moved. Neither time did she become upset, as she had done in other classes, nor did she ask for help. Lisa adjusted without needing support (Field Notes, April 27, Media Technology). Mrs. Spade was also able to foster intrinsic motivation through Science Olympiad. She found that this event encouraged students to better themselves and strive to submit better products.

Supporting Reading Schoolwide

Reading was emphasized in Rural School Junior/Senior High. As Mr. Broadfoot indicated, this was something “near and dear” to the superintendent’s heart (Interview #1). With support from the administration, a five-by-five block schedule (five classes, each 75 minutes long, offered on each of two alternating days) was instituted. One of the classes offered was DRI. This dedicated time for reading allowed for all teachers to support all students’ leisure reading habits in grades seven through twelve with novel study and class discussion in leveled groups. This time also allowed for more intensive interventions for students reading significantly behind grade level led by the reading specialist and the English teacher. Additionally, with all teachers engaged in DRI, they saw the application of reading instruction in their own content areas. Mr. Broadfoot commented on the increased reading expectations in Common Core curriculum and noted, “If kids can’t read well, school gets tough the further they go” (Interview #1).

The superintendent’s focus on reading also meant a reading specialist was present to serve the needs of the junior/senior high school, not just the elementary. The previous school

year, the junior/senior high English teacher had served reading needs by providing activities for DRI groups. However, Mrs. Beam noted that she preferred the structure during the 2021-2022 school year which was established by Mrs. Sanders, and Mrs. Beam wanted to continue it. She believed the school was “going in the right direction” with reading instruction and intervention (Interview #1), largely because of the work of Mrs. Sanders. For Mrs. Davis serving her first year as English teacher at Rural School, Mrs. Sanders was “a godsend.” She went on to say, “I’ve been in other districts where I haven’t had that support. It’s hard to meet the needs of every kid...they just all have so many needs...It’s been nice to have her” (Interview #2). Having a reading specialist who could provide resources and ideas for how to support students’ literacy needs in the upper grades was important for Mrs. Davis.

Some teachers struggled with the emphasis on reading, though. While she valued what DRI and Mrs. Sanders’ work with students were accomplishing, Mrs. Beam pointed out that some teachers thought that students’ reading was “an English problem” and commented that teaching reading took away time from teaching content (Interview #1). Reflecting on the semester at the end of the school year, Mrs. Beam stated that she felt like her in-class reading supports for students were weak. “I don’t feel like a qualified reading teacher” (Interview #2). Mr. Broadfoot, also expressed some concerns about teaching reading, especially in DRI, “At first, I thought, ‘What do I know about reading?’” Over time, though, he developed an enjoyment of the class, in part because he wanted his students to become better readers. He stated they “can’t do too much reading” (Interview #1).

Providing Foundational Instruction while Maintaining Rigor

Maintaining rigor was important to Mrs. Sanders, the reading specialist who helped select the literacy-rich math curriculum and designed the DRI instruction teachers provided. Rich

vocabulary was especially important: “Don’t dumb it down. Kids can handle those words as long as we use them in a repetitive, systematic way. They can handle it. It becomes part of their vernacular” (Interview #1). For her, the key to rigor was in the curriculum, making sure that instruction built on itself each year in a systematic way. She helped select a reading curriculum for the elementary that included components of Beers and Probst’s (2013) Notice and Note strategies that students could continue using throughout middle and high school. Mrs. Spade also utilized curriculum in this manner. The 2021-2022 school year was her second full year teaching in the science classroom. Because students had experienced inconsistent science education for several years until her being hired, she wanted to establish a cumulative program where instruction in seventh and eighth grade would support learning in tenth and eleventh: “I wanted everybody’s the same way so that eventually by the time one of my seventh-grade classes gets to biology, they know the stuff enough so that we can move faster, and it is working” (Interview #1). Mrs. Spade admitted it was a slow process, one that the oldest students would not reap the full benefits of.

Other teachers showed a struggle to plan in quite this way for students’ success. Mr. Broadfoot, Mrs. Beam, and Mrs. Davis all expressed at some point more hope than concrete plans for student growth. Mrs. Davis discussed knowing students needed a challenge but explained that while she would like to assign integrated projects that connected reading, writing, research, and speaking, she believed, “if we start doing all these grand projects and group things that they’re not going to be as successful as they could be” (Interview #1). About state assessments, Mrs. Davis said, “On paper, they don’t look like they’re the brightest kids, but I know they are. They just have to go about things a little differently, and that’s not always recognized by standardized testing” (Interview #1). At the end of the year she stated that the

seventh grade students did show growth over the year and that she believed, “they felt like they accomplished something” (Interview #2). However, during the week of state assessments, Mr. Brown observed middle school students becoming very upset and disruptive in Choir. He hypothesized that it may have been “because of the feedback they’re getting on the tests. They feel like their personal worth is being determined by how well or poorly they do on a test” (Email, March 30). When it came to constructing their identities as learners, it appeared that students may have been struggling significantly and not finding the support they needed within the school.

Overarching Question: How Does a Rural Setting Influence Middle School Students’ Reading Identity Construction?

Charlie thought that “in the country and these rural schools you’ve got literally nothing to worry about; you read easy” (Interview #2). He expected there were more distractions in the city that would keep middle school students from reading. On the other hand, Ash, who had spent parts of her childhood in both a large metropolitan city and a rural community, surmised that how middle schoolers experienced reading in the two environments was probably about the same. It is likely students are sometimes prone to positioning themselves as readers in either environment, struggling sometimes and succeeding sometimes. It is also likely that elementary experiences impact students regardless of where they live. Teachers are likely working in both rural and urban environments to find a way to support students’ intrinsic motivation over extrinsic and looking for ways to support reading across the curriculum while maintaining rigor and including foundational instruction as necessary. However, there are little ways in which a rural setting can have a bigger impact in any one of these areas. Some are positive and support

students in their construction of positive reading identities, while some work against those positive reading identities.

Promises

Two positive aspects of the rural setting for the student participants of this study was the care teachers demonstrated for each individual student and the dedication to reading in the building that included access to a reading specialist. Multiple times each teacher I interviewed indicated a genuine care for their students. Student participants, too, spoke of this care. For Lisa and Ash, it was one reason they had each chosen to attend Rural School. While this care for students is not likely unusual of teachers in any setting, the small school setting allowed them to act on this care in more specific ways. For Mrs. Spade, she was able to create instruction that was responsive to individual students' needs. She gave choices of whether to take a quiz or take more time to review, she kept students on individual education plans (IEPs) in the classroom for a quiz and provided needed support instead of sending them out to the resource classroom. She commented, "Sometimes I kind of feel like I treat everybody like they have an IEP even if they don't, just because they need that support" (Interview #1). With just 11 students in the classroom, that individualized attention in lesson planning can be easier than for teachers who face much larger class sizes.

Because Rural School was a PreK-12 building and because of the superintendent's commitment to reading, the reading specialist who was a second-grade teacher in the building was also available to serve the literacy needs of the junior/senior high portion of the building. Middle schools and high schools often do not have reading specialists to work with teachers and students (Bean & Goatley, 2021). Mrs. Sanders administered reading assessments in the junior/senior high, analyzed the data, grouped students accordingly, and designed interventions

or enrichment as needed. She served as a support for Mrs. Davis who turned to her for ideas for supporting the seventh-grade class in English. Mrs. Sanders was also an advocate for the literacy planning and block schedule in the junior/senior high, having explained to the school board the value of this schedule that allowed so much time to be devoted to reading. Her desire to see students succeed in reading and her passion for literacy were evident and impacted other teachers in the junior/senior high including Mrs. Beam who appreciated the DRI novels and focus on increasing leisure reading.

Challenges

Every school faces obstacles regardless of its location. The challenges that Rural School faced in the spring of 2021 did come as a result of their small, rural nature: threat of closure and difficulty attracting and keeping quality teachers. Limited funding and distance make keeping small schools going a challenge for school boards and administrators. Attracting qualified teachers to these schools is just as much a challenge. A discussion of these two key challenges follows.

Threat of Closure

One unique challenge that extremely small schools like Rural School face is the potential of closure. Funding struggles often lead to consolidation of small schools. For Rural School's district school board, operating two high schools with certified teachers for each subject in each building did not make financial sense. At the monthly school board meeting on Monday, March 21, 2022, immediately following spring break, a school board member proposed closing the junior/senior high at Rural School at the end of the 2022-2023 school year and moving all students to South School in the 2023-2024 school year. Rural school had a population of 67 students in grades seven through twelve at the time of the meeting. South School had 118. This

would have made for a combined student body of 185, still small by most standards. This proposal was voted down by a vote of four to three, but the board did decide to explore combining sports at the two schools for the coming school year.

On the following Wednesday, the day the board decision was printed in the local newspaper, the junior/senior high students were called into the commons during Homeroom for an announcement. The principal had been absent since a car accident which occurred before spring break, so the assistant principal addressed the group. The discussion began with emphasizing the importance of eating well and getting sleep during the upcoming week in which they would be completing their state assessments. The discussion then turned to the board meeting and that students would be completing a survey about whether they would travel to South School for sports in the coming year. Mrs. Beam addressed the group stating that Rural School had been through this kind of experience before and would fight to stay open. Mrs. Sanders, who took on elementary school principal responsibilities in the principal's absence, emphasized that the teachers cared for the students. "They worry when you're not here. In bigger schools that is not the case. Be proud of Rural School. Wear your pride on your shirts" (Field Notes, March 23, Homeroom). At the following board meeting on April 11, the same proposal was made to close the junior/senior high portion of Rural School, and it passed by a vote of five to two.

The threat and eventual decision to close became a distraction for all teachers in Rural School and for the students. In one Science period, Charlie discussed with Kai his future plans to attend County School in a different district nearby when Rural School closed. Teachers considered applying for other positions elsewhere for stability. Students like Ash and Lisa, who had chosen Rural School for its size, were concerned about what they would do in the future. Mr.

Brown believed the stress of the threat of closure had added to the pressure of the state assessments. Mrs. Davis struggled to keep academics at the forefront, recognizing that the uncertainty of the upcoming years was adding to her students' struggles:

It's just all those other things my kids are dealing with right now, what's happening with them next year. Where are they gonna go? What are they gonna do? They've just got so many other things on their plate right now that, this sounds terrible for me to say, but their education is not their top priority right now. They've got other things. (Interview #2)

Teacher Quality

Stressing the importance of sufficient financing for schools, Mr. Broadfoot stated that schools need quality teachers to "get the job done." Appropriate funding was necessary "so we can do the things we need to do," which included hiring teachers (Interview #2). Attracting teachers to Rural School on a long-term basis had been difficult. Mrs. Davis was in her first year in the building, and she took a position at South School during the following summer. Mrs. Spade was the first long-term Science teacher in the building in some time. She explained,

They had teachers that were here for two months. They had teachers that were here for six months. They had teachers who were here for a year, but then they left. They had teachers that were just kind of filling in and could do the gist, so they could get them through something. (Interview #1)

The fact that Rural School was situated in a town with fewer than 1,000 residents and was a 40-minute drive to the nearest Walmart made it a less appealing place for some. As gas prices rose in the spring of 2021 due to the conflict in Ukraine, driving became more prohibitive for some. Additionally, Mrs. Beam saw the class load for teachers as something that actually impeded student learning. She said, "There are a lot of preps. You can't be the best teacher and focus on

the quality of teaching when focusing on so many preps” (Interview #2). This can be a strain on teachers and lead to turnover or even prevent some from considering a position such a small school.

Summary

In this study I sought to identify what impact a rural setting has on middle school students’ reading identity construction. To do so, I first examined how the five student participants described themselves as readers. Though the five students, all seventh graders attending Rural School, were very different from one another and had unique experiences in constructing their reading identities, two key similarities stood out among the group. The participants all showed potential for being readers, and they all showed a need for support in continuing to develop their reading identities.

Examining student interviews and observation data revealed that in constructing their reading identities, the student participants experienced positioning, both positioning they did themselves physically and in seeking autonomy and positioning they experienced from the institution of the school itself through differentiated reading instruction, classroom structures, and available resources. The students also experienced struggling and succeeding in their reading and literacy activities in and outside of school.

Examining teacher interviews in combination with data that had already been analyzed helped me identify how the educational environment played a role in shaping middle school students’ reading identities. This shaping occurred through positive elementary experiences, teachers fostering intrinsic over extrinsic motivation, classroom teachers and others within the school building supporting reading across the curriculum, and teachers providing foundational instruction while maintaining rigor.

In conclusion, to answer the overarching question of what influence the rural setting has in middle school students' reading identity construction, I examined the answers to the three sub-questions along with newspaper articles that detailed school board meetings centered around a decision to close the junior/senior high portion of Rural School. Seeking what was uniquely rural within these themes, I found that the small size of the school and classes allowed for teachers to demonstrate care by paying significant attention to individual students, often individualizing instruction to meet student needs. Access to a reading specialist also contributed to stronger literacy instruction provided to middle school students than they might receive elsewhere. Challenges, though, were significant in that because of its rural location and small size, Rural School faced a threat of closing and found it difficult to attract and keep quality teachers. These challenges presented distractions that could impede positive student reading identity instruction. The next chapter will provide a thorough discussion of these findings.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

The purpose of this research was to investigate the experiences that middle school students attending a rural Kansas school had reading and engaging with text both in and outside of school to understand the influence of the rural setting on the construction of their reading identities. This study sought to examine how students perceived themselves as readers and what factors in their lives shaped those perceptions. This research sought to answer the following overarching research question and sub-questions. The overarching research question for this study was, “How does a rural setting influence middle school students’ reading identity construction?” To answer this question, I first answered three sub-questions:

RQ 1: How do middle school students in a rural Kansas school describe themselves as readers?

RQ 2: How do middle school students in a rural Kansas school experience constructing their reading identities in and outside of the school setting?

RQ 3: What role does the educational environment play in shaping rural Kansas middle school students’ reading identities.

The previous chapter presented the findings from the research study. This chapter will present a discussion of these findings, focusing first on conclusions drawn from investigating each of the sub-questions and then the overarching question. This chapter will also present alignment of the findings to the theoretical framework, implications for stakeholders, and recommendations for future research.

Research Conclusions

This research study examined the experiences of five seventh-grade students in a rural PreK-12 school building in Kansas. The setting itself is unique, as there are not many PreK-12 school buildings in Kansas. The students are each unique as well. Such a limited focus means that the results of this study are not necessarily generalizable to all populations. However, by considering the stories of multiple student participants and comparing them in a collective case study, I have increased the transferability of the findings (Yin, 2014). Additionally, transferability lies in those findings. A thorough description of the findings in the previous chapter allows the reader to determine if these findings and the subsequent conclusions fit with the contexts with which the reader is familiar (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the sections that follow I will discuss the conclusions I have drawn based on my findings by answering each of the research sub-questions and the overarching question from this study.

RQ 1: How do middle school students in a rural Kansas school describe themselves as readers?

Rural middle school students have the potential to see themselves as readers; this potential requires ongoing support in and outside of the school setting throughout the middle school years. For students like Ash, Kai, and Lisa, who did not necessarily see themselves as readers, potential to develop this identity still exists as evidenced by their ability to state preferences in reading and reading conditions, describing positive reading experiences in the past and books that “hooked” them, and understanding academic applications of reading. Educators can build on these strengths to connect with students’ interests, preferences, and backgrounds to engage them more with positive reading experiences. Some middle school students like Charlie and Cooper, may enter middle school with positive reading identities having had positive reading

experiences in elementary; however, even these students tend to identify supports needed to keep them engaged with reading and seeing themselves as readers. Charlie needed a quiet place to read, free from distractions. Cooper wanted to be able to read books that related to his other interests so that he could better engage with the text. For most of the participants, choice in reading materials was also important. When teachers can identify and support reading needs, all students have the potential of developing positive reading identities.

RQ 2: How do middle school students in a rural Kansas school experience constructing their reading identities in and outside of the school setting?

As they construct their identities, reading and otherwise, middle school students experience positioning, struggling, and succeeding. The positioning students experience can be that which they initiate as they physically situate themselves in a space or with their posture, but it can also be positions that teachers and education institutions place them in. When positioning themselves, students may exert their autonomy. This can appear positive when they choose to sit away from those who are distracting as Ash did, but it can appear negative when they choose to sit at the back of the room and play video games as Cooper did. Recognizing students will make these choices and reinforcing positive decision making can support students' progress toward making more positive positioning choices. Monitoring negative positioning can also inform teachers of possible breakdown in understanding and engagement, as was the case when Kai chose to put her textbook on her head as Mrs. Davis summarized what the class had just read.

Educational institutions play significant roles, positive and negative, in positioning students for learning and constructing their reading identities. These roles come in the form of assessment structures, class placement, and even building culture around attitudes of what environment best promotes learning. Rural School assessed all students in the junior/senior high

in reading and placed them in DRI classes according to their abilities. This positioning told students whether they were good readers or poor readers or somewhere in the middle. Ash saw the DRI group she was placed in as affirmation of her reading skills, yet she appeared to struggle and still need support. Because of the label she received, though, she decided she did not really need to do the work required of her because she was already an advanced reader. Charlie, Cooper, and Lisa were all in the lowest two DRI groups and were aware of their placement. Lisa understood the benefit she was receiving from her instruction in DRI. Charlie and Cooper, though, did not thrive in the same way and may have been held back by the label of struggling reader and placement in low DRI groups.

Teachers within the school building position students in their classrooms with seating arrangements or by not using assigned seating which leaves students more responsibility to make wise choices about who they sit next to. When teachers like Mrs. Davis and Mrs. Spade chose to not use assigned seats, students often sat next to friends they could talk to, and classrooms became noisy and disruptive, especially for those who needed quiet spaces to read in. Mr. Broadfoot maintained a seating arrangement that kept students in rows, facing front, and separated from their peers. This resulted in a quiet room where learning was very solitary. Mrs. Beam positioned students for learning by assigning seats at round tables that allowed students to collaborate but kept them fairly separated from those they tended to talk to. In her room, reading time was quiet, and more hospitable for those who struggled.

As they construct their reading identities, students experience both struggle and success. Often the struggle leads to the success. This is a fact that teachers can embrace as they support students in developing positive reading identities. Mrs. Davis knew that students experienced difficulties outside of school and at times tried to cushion the in-school experiences by creating

activities where students were more likely to experience success. Mrs. Ford, on the other hand, created a classroom environment where students experienced struggle, immediate feedback based on whether what they tried worked, and opportunities to revise until they succeeded and could view themselves as capable problem solvers. Embracing the struggle along with the success will allow teachers to better support positive reading identity construction and will allow students to develop strong positive images of themselves as readers.

RQ 3: What role does the educational environment play in shaping rural Kansas middle school students' reading identities?

Evidence revealed that multiple aspects of their educational environment impact students' construction of reading identities including, (a) elementary experiences, (b) a focus on intrinsic motivation, (c) schoolwide support for reading, and (d) maintaining high instructional rigor. Students coming out of elementary school with positive reading experiences are more likely to head into middle school with positive reading identities than those who had negative elementary reading experiences as I observed with Charlie and Cooper who had positive elementary experiences and still saw themselves as readers while Ash, Kai, and Lisa each had some negative experience and was less likely to see herself as a reader. As students are expected to develop more independence in middle school, their interests in goal setting fostered in elementary can be utilized in middle school to create an effective transition from extrinsic to intrinsic motivation. Charlie and Cooper both spoke of wanting to set goals, and teachers spoke of wanting students to have more independence. These two desires fit well together to help students transition through middle school and into high school. Schoolwide emphasis on reading leads to more reading models in the building and more teachers consciously considering reading in their planning and support of student learning. With all teachers engaged in reading instruction at Rural School and

with support of a Reading Specialist, they were more inclined to be intentional about reading instruction in the content classrooms. When teachers incorporate challenging activities in their instruction, students become more engaged and motivated. Students were less engaged when activities centered around foundational skill learning. Integrated instruction that gave them more autonomy and responsibility and resulted in more enthusiasm and engagement.

Overarching question: How does a rural setting influence middle school students' reading identity construction?

A small, rural school environment can allow for conditions that easily support the construction of positive reading identities among its middle school students; however, remoteness and threat of closure can eclipse the impact of those conditions. A small school environment often allows for teachers to get to know families and students well. At Rural School, teachers and students alike spoke of the care that teachers had for students. One teacher even called a student to wake her up when she did not arrive to school during Homeroom; the student had overslept and did not have anyone at home to wake her. Instruction can more easily be tailored to meet students' individual needs, as Mrs. Spade had done, when there are fewer students in each classroom. Unfortunately, when a school is faced with possible closure, it puts the identity of the school itself on the line. Amidst this larger identity crisis, it can be difficult for students to determine who they are in other respects, including as readers. Teachers and students alike can be distracted from academics by such threats. Without the needed ongoing support for their reading identities and an ongoing focus on rigorous instruction and high expectations, middle school students' reading identities do not receive necessary attention and are not fostered.

Alignment to Theoretical Framework

As students transition out of elementary into middle school, they begin to establish who they are through their experiences and interactions as they navigate new expectations and responsibilities that come with a new level in their education (Moll, 2013). Students establish identities that allow them to connect with others with whom they have commonalities (Gee, 1990), identities that they create for themselves or that others assign to them (Gee, 2000). Among the many identities middle school students may assume are reading identities which can relate to qualities like genre preferences or how well or how much students read (Alvermann, 2001). When students feel positive about reading, have confidence when reading, and see value in the activity of reading, they are more likely to be motivated to read which will lead to greater success reading (Guthrie, 2007). When schools assign labels like “struggling reader” to students, this can be difficult for students to overcome and position themselves differently in the eyes of teachers and others who often reinforce the institutional identity construction (Gee, 2000; Harré et al., 2009). Teachers and other school personnel can support students in ways that encourage positive reading identity construction such as providing choice in reading materials, independent reading time during the school day, and opportunities to discuss readings with peers (Boardman et al., 2015; Guthrie et al., 2007; Neugebauer, 2016; Pittman & Honchell, 2014), and building relationships with students to know them and their interests and incorporate this knowledge into instruction and interactions with students (Francois, 2013; Learned, 2016).

As the student participants transitioned out of elementary and into middle school at Rural School, they faced many new expectations and responsibilities that presented a challenge for several. Teachers expected students to be more independent and responsible for themselves and had hoped for students to be more motivated to work. However, in some classes, there was no

evidence that a significant amount of work had been done to connect the work with students' interests. This is one motivating factor that may have helped the students see value in the work assigned beyond a grade in the gradebook. Another motivating factor, confidence, was not always present for the students, either. Their experiencing a lack of confidence was evident to Mr. Brown during the week of state assessments as class broke down during Junior High Choir. As the students worked to identify who they were as students and as readers, the system of reading assessment and placement in DRI classes by ability meant students like Charlie, Cooper, and Lisa were clearly identified as struggling readers while Ash was identified as a strong reader. These labels may not have given these students the necessary confidence to position themselves as readers in their teachers' eyes.

Choice can have a significant impact on students' intrinsic motivation and positive reading identities (Casas, 2010; Glenn et al., 2018), but the teachers provided limited choice to students in class reading. In Science students were able to choose experiments and projects for the science fair. In Social Studies, students were able to choose books to read about aspects of state history and were able to choose the types of review games they wanted to create prior to chapter tests. However, in English, Greek gods were assigned to students for reports, and in DRI the reading specialist chose books different classes would read. While independent reading time is also valuable in helping students establish positive reading identities (ILA, 2019), there was no independent reading time explicitly set aside. There was often time at the end of Math for students to choose what to work on; their choices, though, were usually to watch videos or play games on their computers.

Opportunities to discuss reading can be both motivating and supportive of reading skills and positive reading identities (Boardman et al., 2015; Glenn et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2017). In

Social Studies, Mrs. Beam regularly facilitated classroom discussions. Though these often had predetermined correct answers, students still clearly enjoyed engaging in the discussions with their peers. Some DRI teachers facilitated discussions over the novels in their classes; however, not all gave this opportunity. Some who did, did not always have strong relationships with the students, as was the case for Kai and her DRI teacher. This meant Kai was reluctant to engage in discussion and interact with text on a deeper level. Relationships were strong and meaningful in Rural School, to both students and teachers. The relationships, though, were not always utilized to explicitly support students' reading identities. Mrs. Beam and Mrs. Spade both utilized what they knew about their students to tailor some instruction. Concern for students, though, did not always translate into identifying student strengths and building on those to develop positive attitudes toward reading and motivate students toward achieving higher goals.

Implications

While this study was conducted in one rural school with a small group of students and their teachers, the lessons from the findings can be transferred into other settings with other groups of students. The conclusions drawn from this study lead me to identifying three key implications for both teachers and leaders of rural school systems. With regard to teaching and learning, middle school teachers must provide ongoing support for reading identity construction, should support student struggle in the classroom, and should help students with goal setting and developing intrinsic motivation. Three key areas for rural education leaders to focus on are the impact of the transition from elementary to middle school that students experience, the professional learning needs of teachers, and the role the community can play in the education of students.

Implications for Teaching and Learning

Based on the findings, there are several implications for teaching that this study presents. First, it is necessary for teachers to recognize that reading is more than decoding and comprehension. Second, teachers must provide ongoing support for their students' reading identity construction throughout middle school. Third, teachers should not shy away from student struggle but encourage students as they are challenged. Finally, teachers who help students learn to identify and set their own learning goals can help students move toward being intrinsically motivated.

Recognize Reading Is More than Decoding and Comprehension

The Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE, 2021) devoted \$15,000,000 in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to “train educators in the science of reading through the Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) program” in an effort to stem learning loss resulting from the COVID pandemic. The LETRS curriculum focuses primarily on phonological and phonemic awareness, students' ability to decode, and comprehension components. The curriculum may oversimplify what is a very complex process of reading, leaving out elements like motivation, engagement, and identity. Duke and Cartwright (2021) have proposed an Active View of Reading Model, one that expands on the models used in the LETRS curriculum: the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986, and Hoover & Gough, 1990, as cited in Duke & Cartwright, 2021) and the rope model of reading (Scarborough, 2001, as cited in Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Duke and Cartwright's model reveals more complexity in the elements of learning to read and introduces the roles of motivation and engagement, executive function skills, and strategy use. These elements Duke and Cartwright added to the mix in the process of learning to read are elements that were

evidently important for positive reading identity construction for the participants in this study. These students' identities were not going to benefit from merely focusing on the foundational skills. Their perceptions of themselves and what drove them to read (or not read) went beyond the strands of the reading rope. Teachers have a responsibility to tune in to student needs beyond decoding and comprehending. Not considering what motivates and engages students results in less reading.

Provide Ongoing Support for Reading Identity Construction

Whether students enter middle school with positive reading identities, ongoing support is needed to help students continue to develop these identities. Choice in reading materials, opportunities to connect with personal interests, and opportunities to discuss what they read with others can all provide some of the support needed for middle schoolers identifying who they are as readers (Boardman et al, 2015; Guthrie et al., 2007; Neugebauer, 2016; Pitman & Honchell, 2014). Additionally, providing targeted instruction of foundational reading skills in a comfortable, supportive environment can also make a big impact in helping students who have struggled with reading and as a result struggle to see themselves as readers.

Support Student Struggle

While it can be hard to see students struggling both in and outside of school, the struggles they face in their learning will result in deeper learning in the long run. Students enjoy challenge and opportunities to problem solve. When teachers raise the bar, students typically rise to meet it (Casas, 2010). Unfortunately, many students who struggle with reading are met with basic skills instruction as teachers develop a deficit-based approach to planning instruction, considering what students are “missing” and not focusing on building on students' strengths. While essential, basic skills instruction alone is not sufficient for students to become strategic, thoughtful readers and

writers (Risko & Walker-DalHouse, 2019; Tatum, 2007). Teachers must avoid a deficit view and use strengths-based approaches when planning instruction that will utilize students' strengths to allow them to be challenged and progress to the next level.

Set Goals and Focus on Intrinsic Motivation

Teachers can provide challenge for students by providing instruction for goal setting and allowing them opportunities to set goals and work to meet them. Goal setting is an ideal way to support intrinsic motivation in students, as it gives students control over what they will accomplish and choice and autonomy in the means of reaching the goal (Deci, 1975). In elementary school, students are often exposed to goal setting for extrinsic rewards like parties and points (Smith & Westberg, 2011). However, teachers in this study expressed a desire to see students motivated by their own desire to learn; they wanted students to want to learn and experience the satisfaction that can come with learning and accomplishing a task. Essentially, teachers wanted students to develop a mastery of learning goal orientation, the intrinsic motivation to improve their ability to accomplish tasks in the classroom and beyond (Casas, 2010). Instead, students clung to a performance goals orientation that had them extrinsically motivated and focused on grades, prizes, and teacher approval (Casas, 2010). Students need guidance to move from being extrinsically motivated to intrinsically motivated. By learning to set meaningful learning goals, students “take responsibility for improving, assessing, and expanding their learning” (Routman, 2018), and move toward being more intrinsically motivated as teachers desire.

Implications for Leading Rural School Systems

Rural schools face unique challenges based upon many factors including where they are located, the demographics of the student population, and their size. Regardless of what sets them

apart from other schools, based on the findings of this study, administrators of rural schools should consider the following: (a) the impact of the transition from elementary to middle school that students experience, (b) the professional learning needs of teachers, and (c) the role the community can play in the education of students.

The Transition from Elementary to Middle School

Middle school is an important transition period for students as they move from elementary school into high school. Middle schools, first known as junior highs, were created with an intent to provide industrial arts instruction and meet unique needs of this group that is more independent and yet still needs instruction that is designed to foster their cognitive development and logical thinking and can capitalize on their increasing ability to learn by engaging in discussion with others (Casas, 2010). As rural schools look for ways to consolidate and effectively use their teaching staff and buildings, often middle schools are closed and grades seven and eight are housed in high schools. This move can result in teachers neglecting unique needs of seventh and eighth graders. Simmons and Blyth (1987) theorized,

If change comes too suddenly—that is, if there is too much discontinuity with prior experience—or if change is too early given the children’s cognitive and emotional states, or if it occurs in too many areas of life at once, then presumably individuals will experience great discomfort. (p. 300)

For this reason, it is necessary for school personnel to be attuned to the needs of the middle school students as they transition out of elementary school.

Teacher Support

For teachers to be prepared to meet the unique needs of the middle school population and have the necessary understandings to provide effective instruction that will provide ongoing

support for positive reading identity construction, effectively challenge students while providing instruction in basic skills as needed, and teach students to set goals in order to move toward being more intrinsically motivated, rural school administrators will need to assure that their teachers and other school personnel receive effective professional learning opportunities. Just as students need ongoing support, so do teachers, throughout their careers (Bean & Goatley, 2021). Adequate training is also needed to support teachers in working with the specific population in their rural setting. In their second interviews, both Mrs. Beam and Mrs. Davis discussed a need for professional development that better suited their population. Mrs. Beam said that training for interventions that could help students who have experienced trauma and are living in single-parent households would be helpful. Mrs. Davis pointed out that the state had focused on dyslexia and required a six-hour training on the topic but that she had only had a two-hour training on suicide prevention. She commented, “That balance is wrong” (Interview #2).

Community Connections

One way to support rural students’ reading identities is through supporting their identities as members of a rural community. By embracing a place-based education approach educators can tap into students’ interests and strengthen interest in and connections with the larger community. Educators can leverage resources of the rural community, including its members, to provide engaging, authentic learning experiences that put students’ prior knowledge and experiences at the forefront of their learning. Student participants at Rural School struggled to see how much of what they were learning in their classes applied to their lives beyond the school walls. Some even struggled to identify purposes for reading that were not school related. Place-based educational practices help students connect their learning to those experiences outside of school. These practices can also help students make connections between subjects as they often

integrate learning in the various content areas (Nichols et al., 2016). Such integrated lessons can provide greater challenge to students that they will be more intrinsically motivated to engage in because the experiences validate their prior knowledge and experiences and they will see value in the activities, including reading, connected to their interests. Helping middle school students see the practical value of reading in their lives will support them be more successful with reading as they transition into high school (Cantrell et al., 2018). Azano et al. (2021) recommend exploring the local rural community with a rural community walk (Downey, 2021, as cited in Azano et al.). Such a walk would allow administrators and teachers to learn about their communities, identify strengths and assets, and make use of those to support student growth.

Recommendations for Further Research

The intent of this narrative inquiry into a collective case study was to explore factors that influence reading identity construction in rural middle school students. This study focused on just five seventh-grade students and seven of their teachers in one rural school during a 13-week period. The observations made and stories collected provide a small picture of the experiences of rural middle school students as they construct their reading identities. What follows are recommendations for future research that emerged from the findings of this study: (a) identify rural community literacy supports, (b) identify which elementary experiences impact reading identities most, (c) identify means of developing intrinsic motivation to read in middle school students, (d) identify how to create support systems in consolidation and school closure, (e) identify the impact of alternative licensure programs on rural students and their reading identities, and identify the impact of place-based education on students' reading identities.

Identify Rural Community Literacy Supports

I centered my research within the school building and learned some about the surrounding community influence from students and teachers. However, future research into rural student reading identity construction should more closely examine literacy supports within the communities in which students live, go to school, and engage with others. For teachers and administrators to be able to leverage the resources within their communities, it would be beneficial to understand their impact on students' literacy development and reading identity development and how these resources can be best employed for students' benefit.

Identify Impactful Elementary Experiences

Future research should examine which aspects of elementary education have the greatest influence on students' perceiving themselves as readers as they transition into middle school. Identifying such factors may help teachers and administrators ensure that students are positioned as readers as they enter middle school. In this study, both Charlie and Cooper had positive elementary experiences, saw themselves as readers, and had positive attitudes toward reading in their second semester in middle school. Often students who excel in reading are more likely to have these positive attitudes (Malloy et al., 2017), but Charlie and Cooper were assigned to the lowest DRI groups because of their low scores on reading assessments. This indicated that skilled reading is not the only factor leading to positive elementary reading experiences and positive attitudes toward reading. Ash was a capable reader but had negative experiences at school with bullying. A question remains of whether elementary school bullying was the only factor that kept her from viewing reading positively.

Identify Means of Developing Intrinsic Motivation to Read

Because “intrinsic reading motivation positively predicts both reading amount and reading achievement” (Troyer et al., 2018, p. 1213), continuing to examine how to develop intrinsic motivation in students is important. Part of this examination should include an investigation into what prevents teachers from employing methods that promote intrinsic motivation. Much research has been conducted in the area of motivation to read (Conradi et al., 2014; Guthrie et al., 2007; Louick et al., 2016; Malloy et al., 2017; McGeown et al., 2015; Schiefele et al., 2012) and intrinsic motivation (Crow, 2011; Deci, 1975; De Naeghel et al., 2014; Troyer et al., 2019), yet teachers and administrators often fall back on practices of promoting extrinsic motivation with rewards of parties and movies and encouraging students to look to adults for approval. Even grades become an extrinsic reward. It may be that Ash was rejecting the control over her held by others that extrinsic rewards for performance were tied to (Deci, 1975). Understanding the full impact of extrinsic rewards and what keeps teachers from moving away from them could help administrators as well as teacher preparation programs provide support to in- and pre-service teachers to turn focus toward cultivating intrinsic motivation in middle school students.

Identify How to Create Support Systems in Consolidation and Closure

A majority of the research conducted on school closures has tended to focus on urban school closures, though a majority of closures happen in suburban and rural areas; additionally, parent and community member responses to closure has gotten more attention in the literature as opposed to teacher and student experiences (Ewing & Green, (2022)). More research is needed in this area to understand the experiences of teachers and students in rural schools undergoing a threat or process of closure. Such research could investigate methods that provide effective

support for teachers and students during such a process so that education remains a focal point and student and teacher needs are appropriately met. Because rural schools are often the center of their communities, additional research could investigate the effects of maintaining a community connection, even when students travel away from the community for schooling, and how to maintain such a connection if it proves beneficial to students and the community.

Identify the Impact of Alternative Licensure Programs on Rural Students

As many parts of the country, especially rural areas, face a teacher shortage, alternative licensure programs are a popular pathway for many teachers and districts. In cases like Mrs. Spade's, an alternative licensure program can be both a way to keep educated community members in the community and provide a much-needed, consistent science-education program for students. Limited research exists on the impact of alternative licensure programs on students' education. More of this research has been conducted regarding teachers in science and mathematics than in ELA. Identifying the impact that teachers who complete limited licensure programs have on rural schools in particular could be beneficial to structuring curriculum and supports for these programs. Identifying the impact these teachers could have on students' reading identities can also influence curriculum in these programs.

Identify the Impact of Place-Based Education on Reading Identities

If place-based education can help students make meaningful connections between where they live and what they learn in school (Nichols et al., 2016), and if students see more value in reading when it is relevant to their lives (Butz & Usher, 2015), then what impact does place-based education have on students' reading identities? If research could explore this aspect of place-based education, it may be possible to identify how to utilize place-based education

methods to bolster students' reading identities and, consequently, their performance with reading tasks.

Epilogue

Student reading identities are constructed by students themselves (Alvermann, 2001) as well as by the communities, institutions, and people that surround them (Gee, 2000). The rural setting in which students are situated can, therefore, have an impact on that identity construction; after all, place does help shape a person's identity (Budge, 2010). This study sought to identify what influence the rural setting has on middle school students' reading identity construction. Much as Neufeld (2019) stitched together pieces of fabric representing different stories into a larger quilt, I have brought together the stories of five seventh-grade student participants and seven of their teachers to tell a portion of the story of students' construction of their reading identities in a small, rural Kansas school.

From listening to stories, observing students, examining details, and retelling stories, I have found that middle school students have the potential to develop positive reading identities but that they need ongoing support in this area which can come in the form of choice in texts, opportunities to discuss, and quiet reading spaces. As they construct their identities, reading and otherwise, middle school students experience positioning, struggling, and succeeding. Students position themselves in positive and negative ways, and schools position students in positive and negative ways as well. Negative positioning by the educational institution should be mitigated. Student struggles can be a positive step on the way to success and should not be something to shy away from academically. Elementary experiences influence reading identities. Coming out of elementary school, many students are driven by extrinsic motivation, so shifting to a focus on intrinsic motivation to read and learn can improve reading identities during the middle school

transition. Schoolwide support for reading helps support construction of positive reading identities, and maintaining rigor while also providing instruction in foundational elements benefits the construction of positive reading identities as well.

Most of the items mentioned previously likely apply to students attending schools of varying sizes in various locations, not just rural schools. However, a few factors were clearly influenced by the location of Rural School, leading me to find that a small, rural school environment can allow for conditions that easily support the construction of positive reading identities among its middle school students; however, remoteness and threat of closure can eclipse the impact of those conditions.

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Appendix A - IRB Approval



TO: Lotta Larson
Curriculum and Instruction
Manhattan, KS 66506

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 12/14/2021

RE: Approval of Proposal Entitled, "Reading Identity Construction in Rural Middle School Students."

Proposal Number IRB-10961

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects has reviewed your proposal and has granted full approval. This proposal is **approved for three years from the date of this correspondence.**

APPROVAL DATE: 12/14/2021

EXPIRATION DATE: 12/13/2024

In giving its approval, the Committee has determined that:

No more than minimal risk to subjects

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file as written. Any change or modification affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. All approved proposals are subject to continuing review, which may include the examination of records connected with the project. Announced post-approval monitoring may be performed during the course of this approval period by URCO staff. Injuries, unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the IRB and / or the URCO.

Electronically signed by Rick Scheidt on 12/14/2021 1:27 PM ET

Appendix B - Research Timeline

Date	Research Activity	Data Collected
February 9	Introduce research to faculty Introduce research to seventh-grade students Recruit Participants	
February 16	Informal discussion: Reading Specialist Observation: Homeroom, English	Field notes
February 17	Observation: Science	Field notes
February 18	Observation: English, Junior High Band, Kai's DRI	Field notes
March 2	Teacher Interview #1: Mrs. Spade Observation: Kai's Homeroom, English, Junior High Band, Charlie's DRI 35 min., Ash's DRI 35 min., FACS	Interview notes, Field notes
March 3	Participant Interview #1: Kai Teacher Interview #1: Mrs. Sanders Observation: Science, Social Studies	Interview transcript, Field notes
March 9	Participant Interview #1: Cooper Informal discussion: Music teacher Observation: Science, Social Studies	Interview transcript, Field notes
March 10	Snow day; no school	
March 11	Participant Interview #1: Charlie Observation: Science, Social Studies, Math	Interview transcript, Field notes
March 14-18	Spring Break	
March 24	Participant Interview #1: Ash Observation: Morning announcement for 7th-12 th grades in cafeteria, English, Media Technology, Ash's DRI	Field notes Newspaper Article
March 25	Participant Interview #1: Lisa Teacher Interviews #1: Mrs. Davis, Mr. Broadfoot Observation: Science, Social Studies, Math	Interview transcripts, Interview notes, Field notes
March 30	Observation: (State Assessment Schedule) Junior High Choir, FACS Email: Mr. Brown	Field notes
April 5	Observation: English, Mr. Broadfoot's DRI	Field notes Newspaper article
April 6	Teacher Interview #1: Mrs. Spade Observation: Science,	Interview transcript, Field notes
April 7-26	I was asked to give some space to teachers and students—limited my observations, no interviews	
April 13	Observation: Cooper & Lisa's DRI Email: Mr. Brown	Field notes
April 14	Observation: Ash's Homeroom, Science	Field notes Newspaper article

April 27	Observation: Media Technology, Ash's DRI	Field notes Newspaper article
April 28	Observation: Science, Social Studies	Field notes
April 29	Participant Interviews #2: Ash, Kai Observation: English	Interview transcripts, Field notes, Photographs, Student work samples, Newspaper article
May 5	Observation: English	Field notes
May 6	Teacher Interview #2: Mr. Broadfoot	Interview notes, Newspaper articles
May 9	Participant Interview #2: Lisa Participant Interview #3: Charlie Teacher Interview #2: Mrs. Beam, Mrs. Davis Observation: English, Library during Media Technology, Cooper & Lisa's DRI Email: Mrs. Ford	Interview transcripts, Interview notes, Field notes
May 11	Teacher Interview #1: Mrs. Clark Observation: Junior/Senior High Science Fair	Interview transcript, Field notes
May 13	Observation: English	Field notes

Appendix C - Interview Protocol

Student Participant Interviews

Two open-ended, semi-structured interviews conducted with student participants during the course of the study. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. Questions listed were used as guiding questions. Some are taken from Ivey and Broaddus (2001). The first interview focused on each student's individual identity and experience as a reader. The second interview addressed students' experiences with reading at school and in the rural setting of their community.

Sample Questions from Interview 1

Tell me about what you brought with you.

How does this fit into the larger story of who you are as a reader?

How do you feel about reading? How good of a reader do you think you are? Why do you think that?

From your survey, I see that you read X. Tell me about that.

Where do you get the materials you like to read? (What materials? Audio books?)

Do you have preferences for where you read? Explain those.

Tell me about a time when you got "hooked" on a book. What "hooked" you?

Have you had other positive experiences with reading? Tell me about those.

Tell me about the worst reading experience you've had? What was bad about it?

What book would you suggest for someone who has never liked to read? Why would you recommend that book?

Do you discuss your reading with anyone else? Tell me about that.

Sample Questions from Interview 2

How would your teachers describe you as a reader? Why is that? Do you describe yourself the same way? If there is a difference, why is that?

What kinds of things do you read in school? (Get participants to describe this in detail.)

Describe what reading experiences are like in school? What kinds of reading do you do? What kinds of opportunities to read do you have? Where do the reading materials come from?

Is there a good reading experience you've had in school? Tell me about it. (If not named in Interview 1)

Tell me about the worst reading experience you've had in school. What was bad about it? (If not named in Interview 1)

Describe times in school when you can talk about what you have read.

Is there anyone in your classes who is similar to you as a reader? Who? In what ways?

Is there anyone in your classes who is different than you as a reader? Who? In what ways?

What do you think motivates students to read in school?

Do you like to read outside of school?

Is your reading different when you're not in school? How?

Does the reading you do in school connect with what you do outside of school?

How important do you think reading is outside of school? Tell me about that?

Do you think kids like you who go to small schools in rural counties like this read differently than kids who go to larger schools? Why is that?

What kinds of reading materials do you have at home? Where else can you get things to read?

Where, outside of school, do you see other people reading? What do you think about that?

Is there anything about reading that you wanted to share with me that you haven't shared yet?

Are there questions you wished I would ask you? What are they? Why are they important to you?

Teacher Interviews

During the course of the study, I conducted two open-ended, semi-structured interviews conducted with core content area teachers at Rural School who consented to participate. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. Questions listed were used as guiding questions.

Sample Questions from Interview 1

What are your overall goals for students in your class? Why?

How do you help students meet those goals? (What resources do you use?)

What do you think causes some students to struggle in your class?

Are there particular activities that students struggle with? What are they? Why do you think these cause students to struggle?

Tell me about supports that help students who struggle in your class?

What kinds of academic or learning identities do you see enacted by the students in your class?

(student, conscientious, reader, etc.) What kinds of identities do you see enacted by the student participants? What do you think supports the positive identities in your class? Explain that.

Explain the role of reading and writing in your class.

How do you perceive student engagement with these activities? Specifically engagement of student participants?

What kinds of texts do students read in your class?

How do reading and other activities in your class relate to the community and students' interests and their lives outside of school?

What role do you think a small school and rural environment play in the student participants learning, literacy experiences, and development of their reading identities?

Do you have work samples from the student participants?

Do you know of people or organizations in the community who have helped contribute to students' positive reading identities?

Sample Questions from Interview 2

How has this semester gone? Have you met your instructional goals? Explain.

What has been the role of literacy in your class this semester?

What aspects have students succeeded with? Why do you think they were successful with this?

What aspects did students struggle most with? Why do you think that is?

What growth have you seen in the student participants this year? What areas do you perceive a need for growth in?

What helps you support all students' learning in your class? Why? How?

How do you connect students' learning with their interests, their community, the rural setting?

What changes would you like to see in the school, district, or state that would help support all students' learning?

Appendix D - RQ 2 Coding Matrix

	Positioning	DRI Experience	Experiencing Success	Struggling
Ash	Changing schools Choosing groups Turning her back Not working Choosing seat/space	Negative Did not like being in w/HS students. Did not think she needs this.	*Capable of leading *Helping peers *Engaging in discussion Scoring high on reading assessment.	Lacks self-confidence Unprepared/incompletes Not fully engaged Not asking Avoiding Reading resistance
Charlie	Being close to and looking at teacher Moving around room Distracting others Reviewing Choosing whether to use resource room	Positive first. semester w/RS (2 nd grade tchr) Negative 2 nd semester — did not connect with text—wanted choice	*Leading/Taking charge *Supporting Peers *Engaging in discussion *Printing story & had in library Participating & answering Wanting to improve Describing with detail	Not connecting reading w/grade Lacking confidence/ wanting to please Denying responsibility Not following directions Being unprepared Avoiding, Not asking Not Problem Solving
Cooper	Sitting near partner Leaning in while working Standing up for self Moving	Positive (at least not negative) Reading ahead in ISS	*Receiving teacher validation *Engaging in discussion, conversations & jokes in classroom Wanting to have success Calling baseball games	Incomplete work Avoiding/Delaying Talking Being unprepared Pushing limits Settling for minimum
Kai	Sitting up, looking at teacher Sitting near teacher, facing front Being distracted, inattentive, fidgeting Choosing seat/space	Negative Did not connect with students or teacher Did not enjoy book selections	*Receiving teacher validation *Engaging in discussion *Researching more on area history independently Hypothesizing about reading Summarizing with detail Enjoying acting	Difficulty connecting with others In a distracting environment Doesn't see "real world" application for academics Reads occasionally Uncomfortable reading aloud
Lisa	Changing schools Changing tables Not following directions, not reporting to class Not reading Making adjustments without arguing	Positive Had opportunities to read aloud Received help for struggles Saw benefits	*Helping others *Receiving teacher validation *Engaging with discussion Getting help Understanding how to read GN in DRI Seeing improved reading and benefit of DRI Problem solving	Avoiding/escaping work/class Cheating Lacking confidence/wanting approval Lacking vocabulary Wanting quick answers Being unprepared