

ABSTRACT

Literature Circles and the Reader Self-Efficacy of Reluctant and/or Struggling Readers

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In an era of high-stakes accountability measures in education, the researcher designed this study to explore a more student-centered approach to English language arts and reading instruction via literature circles. The researcher designed an embedded multiple case study to explore the influence of literature circle participation upon the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling intermediate-grades readers. The researcher observed seven cases prior to, during, and following their participation in an eight-week literature circle cycle. The results and findings suggest that literature circles positively influenced, or improved, the reader self-efficacy of those cases who participated in this study. Similarly, each of the seven cases characterized literature circles as beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable. Thus, literature circles seemingly offer a more student-centered and engaging approach to literacy development than more typical classroom activities in English language arts and reading instruction.

Literature Circles and the Reader Self-Efficacy of Reluctant and/or Struggling Readers

by

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DEDICATION

To my loving and supportive husband, Justin, and our angels, Addison and Greyson.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Since No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was enacted in 2002, emphasis on reading instruction has grown. Yet reading achievement has not proportionately increased given the amount of instructional time devoted to English language arts and reading. McMurrer (2007) found that 62% of districts increased the time allotted for English language arts and reading instruction. Despite the relatively ubiquitous focus upon reading, reading achievement scores have generally remained stagnant. Nationally, the reading achievement scores of fourth-graders on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) have increased from 2002 to 2015 by four points (219 to 223) yet continue to remain below the proficient cut score (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016a). The lack of growth, given the amount of time devoted to English language arts and reading instruction, in fourth-graders' reading achievement is particularly concerning.

With more instructional time being allotted to English language arts and reading instruction, how can educators begin to encourage student growth and not preclude it? The answer lies perhaps in a study of effective fourth-grade teachers conducted by language arts researchers Richard Allington and Peter Johnston. The exemplary fourth-grade teachers in Allington & Johnston's (2001) study taught, modeled, and expected classroom talk that was respectful, supportive, and productive. This kind of classroom talk led to increased dialogue amongst students (Allington & Johnston, 2001). Allington

& Johnston (2001) wrote of the curriculum in these effective teachers' classrooms, "Student interests were commonly the driving force, accommodated by a flexible sense of the required curriculum" (p. 16). Similarly, effective fourth-grade teachers were strategic in incorporating student choice and leading students to learn from their errors (Allington & Johnston, 2001). Finally, the teachers studied by Allington & Johnston (2001) conducted holistic evaluation of their students, paid particular attention to students' individual development and goals, and encouraged students' self-evaluation. The aforementioned attributes of effective and exemplary teachers identified in Allington & Johnston's (2001) study are elements present in literature circles which was the focus of this research study.

The researcher chose to explore literature circles through this study out of a belief that literature circles are beneficial to students' growth in English language arts and reading. The aforementioned findings from Allington & Johnston's (2001) study seem to corroborate the researcher's hypothesis as many of the characteristics of literature circles align with those found in the classrooms of effective and exemplary teachers. For example, literature circles feature peer-led discussions that are both socially and academically supportive (Potenza-Radis, 2010). Students are at the heart of literature circles much like they are central to the curriculum utilized in the classrooms of effective teachers. For instance, each student-led literature circle forms around its members' choice of text (Daniels, 2002). Therefore, as Mills & Jennings (2011) remarked, "literature circles can bring the reading curriculum to life in powerful ways..." (p. 591). Additionally, teacher observation and student self-assessment are essential to literature circles (Daniels & Steineke, 2004). Apart from incorporating many of the characteristics

of exemplary teachers' classrooms, literature circles address several components of standards-based English language arts and reading instruction. *The Standards for the English Language Arts* authored by the International Literacy Association & National Council of Teachers of English (1996) recommended that teachers utilize literature-based instruction in collaborative classrooms in which students read and discuss texts that they have chosen. Literature circles appear to integrate many of the elements employed by effective classroom teachers while also meeting standards set forth by the two leading professional organizations in the field of literacy. Thus, the researcher explored the influence of literature circles upon the self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers through this study.

Problem

The current era of increased accountability measures has narrowed the curriculum, thereby creating a less motivating learning environment, particularly for students such as reluctant and/or struggling readers who need it the most. Emphasis on mathematics and English language arts and reading instruction has increased as nationwide these subjects are consistently tested via state assessments in grades three through eight. Tienken & Zhao (2013) argued that increased accountability measures have inevitably reduced the curriculum to these two content areas. Educators likewise report that No Child Left Behind has led to a narrowed curriculum and more test preparation (Hamilton et al., 2007). Scores on state standardized assessments have improved significantly since the enactment of No Child Left Behind (Jennings & Bearak, 2014). Despite these gains, American students' scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress and international assessments have not markedly improved

(Jennings & Bearak, 2014). Therefore, Jennings & Bearak (2014) argued that teaching to the test resulted in the inflation of students' state standardized assessment scores. Thus, increased scores on state standardized assessments of reading give the false notion that reading achievement among American students has improved—a notion that both national and international standardized reading assessments disprove. Limiting the curriculum to essentially that which is tested has the short-term effect of improving state standardized assessment scores yet ultimately fails to enhance students' academic success.

Teaching to the test is solely beneficial in terms of leading to short-term gains in student learning (i.e. improving students' state standardized assessment scores) and is detrimental in most other respects. Pool & Vander Putten (2015) found that contemporary college students are largely unprepared to meet postsecondary expectations. This is significant because the current generation of college students is the first to have experienced the entirety of their K-12 schooling under No Child Left Behind (Pool & Vander Putten, 2015). Higher state standardized assessment scores do not necessarily translate to greater postsecondary attainment or increased future earnings (Deming, Cohodes, Jennings, & Jencks, 2016). Undoubtedly, PK-12 academic success is indicative of one's postsecondary endeavors and earnings, but academic success is not solely predicated on one's cognition. Carey, Brigman, Webb, Villares & Harrington (2014) wrote that academic success stems primarily from three skillsets: (1) cognitive and metacognitive (goal setting, memory skills, and progress monitoring), (2) social and interpersonal skills (listening, problem-solving, and working on teams), and (3) self-management (managing attention and motivation). In terms of literacy, research has

shown that academic and overall success in life is dependent upon strong literacy skills (Murnane, Sawhill & Snow, 2012). A study conducted by Cooper, Moore, Powers, Cleveland, & Greenberg (2014) found that kindergarten children with low to average reading skills but higher levels of social skills performed better on fifth-grade assessments than their peers of similar reading skills yet lower social skills. However, those kindergarteners who had strong early reading skills also had strong fifth-grade academic outcomes, regardless of their social skills (Cooper et al., 2014). Therefore, one may conclude that a child's literacy success is influenced by a combination of his or her reading and social skills. Following the enactment of NCLB, an additional 45 minutes—50 minutes in high poverty schools—of instructional time was devoted to English language arts and reading instruction (Dee, Jacob & Schwartz, 2013). However, this increased focus has not parlayed into gains in terms of reading achievement. Deming et al. (2016) explained,

Clearly, accountability systems that rely on short-term, quantifiable measures to drive improved performance can lead to unintended consequences. Performance incentives may cause schools and teachers to redirect their efforts toward the least costly ways of raising test scores, at the expense of actions that do not boost scores but may be important for students' long-term welfare (p. 73).

Restricting English language arts and reading instruction to essentially test preparation limits students' opportunities to further develop the social skills needed for academic success, particularly for reluctant and/or struggling readers. Unfortunately, while teaching to the test via a narrowed curriculum has increased students' scores on state standardized assessments, it has thereby decreased the opportunity to engage students in learning that strengthens the cognitive and social domains of their academic success.

Offering students opportunities to build their cognitive and social domains within the context of English language arts and reading instruction can improve their literacy, which is especially important for reluctant and/or struggling readers. A reluctant reader is capable of decoding words in text yet opts not to read unless required to do so to function in daily life (Chambers, 1969). Struggling readers often read below grade level (Hoyte, 2006). Building all three facets of academic success (i.e. cognitive, social, and self-management skills) is especially critical for reluctant readers. As Beers (2003) wrote, “simply improving the cognitive aspects of reading (comprehension, vocabulary, decoding, and word recognition) does not ensure that the affective aspects of reading (motivation, enjoyment, engagement) will automatically improve” (p. 13). Readers with a positive affect towards reading are willing and active participants in a community of readers, read for pleasure, and have a positive attitude towards reading (Beers, 2003). Unfortunately, excessive focus on preparing for standardized assessments does not present opportunities to improve the affective aspects of reading for reluctant and/or struggling readers. As Brinda (2011) wrote, “the demands of meeting standards and preparing for accountability tests...limit the time teachers have to transform students’ negative attitudes toward reading and responding to literature” (p. 9). Brinda (2011) developed what he termed the *ladder to literacy* in his study with reluctant middle-grades readers. The rungs on the ladder to literacy seen in Figure 1.1 consist of elements that can facilitate the transition of reluctant readers from aliteracy to literacy (Brinda, 2011). The classroom teacher of the sixteen reluctant readers in Brinda’s (2011) study noted that while not all of the students became proficient readers, improvement was observed in their overall willingness to participate in reading. One means of incorporating many of

the elements identified in the ladder to literacy is through the instructional strategy of literature circles which was the focus of this study.

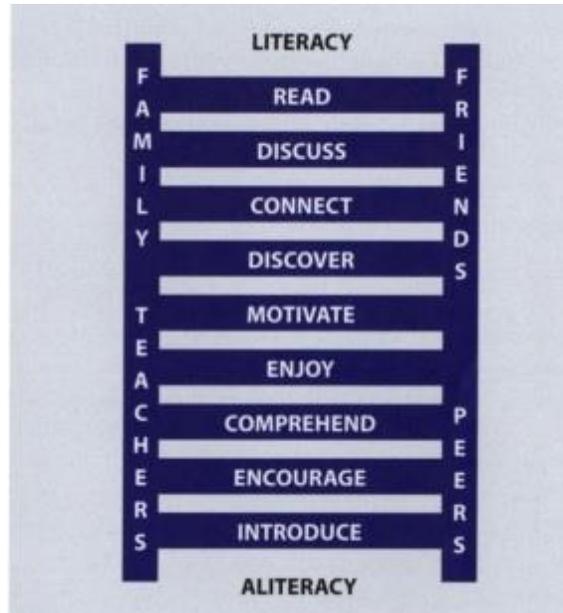


Figure 1.1. Ladder to Literacy developed by Brinda (2011)

Integrating literature circles into the English language arts and reading classroom is promising, especially in regards to moving reluctant and/or struggling readers towards embracing reading. More specifically, literature circles integrate every rung of Brinda's (2011) ladder to literacy. For example, literature circles introduce students to authentic literature (Whittaker, 2012). Authentic literature refers to narrative or expository texts not written for the express purpose of reading instruction, as opposed to basal readers, for example, which are explicitly written to teach reading skills. Additionally, literature circles introduce children to authentic literacy by providing reading and writing experiences that mimic those of the real world (Sportsman, Certo, Bolt, & Miller, 2011). Participating in literature circles encourages students as they work towards further developing the self-management skills necessary for academic success. Literature circles

encourage student independence and responsibility (Day, Spiegel, McLellan, & Brown, 2002). For example, each literature circle is student-managed, and each member is responsible for preparing for discussion prior to each group meeting. Research has shown that literature circle participation improves students' reading comprehension (Brown, 2002; Klinger, Vaughn, & Schumm, 1998; Sweigart, 1991). Students enjoy reading while participating in literature circles (Whittaker, 2012), and literature circle participants are more motivated to read (Clarke & Holwadel, 2007). In literature circle meetings, each group member shares what he or she discovered about the text from the unique perspective of his or her given role (Thein, Guise, & Sloan, 2011). Ultimately, the teacher decides which roles to incorporate into his or her classroom literature circles. Depending upon his or her role, a student might be asked to identify interesting or seminal passages from the text, create a timeline of events in the plot, identify unique and/or unknown words the author utilized, etc. The various roles that students can assume for literature circles are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two. Despite his or her role, participating in a literature circle helps each student to forge connections between the text and his or her personal life, knowledge, and prior experiences (Day et al., 2002). The essence of literature circles is small group discussion of a common text. Consequently, participating in literature circles requires students to truly engage in reading the text. As each rung of the ladder to literacy can be addressed through literature circles, the researcher explored the influence of literature circles upon the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers through this study.

This study explored the influence of literature circles upon the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers within an intermediate-grades classroom. As

previously mentioned, English language arts and reading teachers must work towards moving reluctant and/or struggling readers from aliteracy to literacy. The researcher hypothesized that one means of doing so is through the instructional strategy of literature circles, particularly because they are more motivating and engaging than the typical English language arts and reading instruction given in test prep-laden classrooms. The researcher situated this study within a theoretical framework that melds together critical literacy and reader response theory. Before delving into the theoretical framework, however, the researcher reviews the purpose of this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this embedded multiple case study was to explore the influence of literature circles upon the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers. This study was conducted in an intermediate-grades classroom housed within a public Montessori-identified magnet school in central Texas. Each reluctant and/or struggling reader who served as an individual case in this study was identified as such based upon his or her score on the Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995) pre-test. To gain a deeper understanding of the influence of literature circles upon the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers, the researcher first conducted within-case analysis for each participant before engaging in cross-case analysis. A review of the literature, outlined in Chapter Two, has revealed a need for this study because previous research has not yet examined the influence of literature circles upon the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers. This current gap in scholarly literature affirmed the researcher's desire to conduct this study in an effort to answer the research questions postulated below

Research Questions

The researcher designed this study to answer the following research questions. Question one represents the central research question that encompassed this study whereas questions two through four represent the three subquestions that likewise framed this study.

1. How do literature circles influence the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers? (central research question)
2. How do reluctant and/or struggling readers describe themselves as readers after participating in literature circles and upon what do they base these descriptions? (first subquestion)
3. What, if any, characteristics of participating in literature circles do reluctant and/or struggling readers perceive as beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable? (second subquestion)
4. Do reluctant and/or struggling readers perceive themselves as having their voices heard during literature circle participation, and why do they say so? (third subquestion)

The theoretical framework guiding this study is further described in the next section.

Theoretical Framework

The primary theory that framed this study was that of critical literacy. Critical literacy curriculum involves examining the social and political conditions of the community (Vasquez, 2014). Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire championed critical literacy and was the first to coin the term (Janks, Dixon, & Ferreira, 2014). Shor & Freire (1987) advocated for critical literacy as a means of critiquing the ideologies

presented in texts. Janks et al. (2014) argued that critical literacy is “‘a pedagogy of hope,’ because it believes in our ability to transform the conditions in which we find ourselves” (p. 145). Critical literacy involves questioning the language, identity, and social practices of print and other modalities (Rogers & Mosely-Wetzel, 2013). Critical literacy can be incorporated into literature circles by posing some of the key questions of critical literacy for discussion. Luke (2012) identified the following potential questions: “What is ‘truth’? How is it presented and represented, by whom, and in whose interests? Who should have access to which images and words, texts, and discourses? For what purposes?” (p. 4). In addition to championing critical literacy, Freire recognized the importance of dialoguing with others as a means of reflecting upon issues of importance to learners. One may argue that critical literacy is an extension of Freire’s libertarian education which emphasizes dialogue.

Dialogue is at the heart of Freire’s libertarian education. Libertarian education involves learners dialoging about real-world issues that are of the utmost importance to them and their communities (Freire, 2014). Morrison (2008) wrote, “If people have choice and freedom to study what interests them, then they become more deeply engaged in, and thus less alienated from, their learning” (p. 53). Libertarian education is the antithesis of what Freire (2014) refers to as the “banking concept of education” (p. 74). Freire believed that those in power define the ideology and knowledge behind schooling (Luke, 2012). Freire (2014) insisted that learners use dialogue as a means for not only reflecting upon real-world issues but also enacting change. As previously stated, dialogue is at the heart of literature circle participation. A teacher who utilized literature circles in

her classroom provided the following quotation in Daniels (2002) that encapsulates how libertarian education comes alive through literature circles:

The greatest benefits are that the majority of students eagerly participate in group and class discussions, they are empowered by their choices, they stretch their learning beyond teacher expectations, they are excited about what they are doing, and the whole process gives room for individuals to be individuals (p. 219).

Fredricks (2012) argued that literature circles help to steer the curriculum away from the banking concept of education. Mills & Jennings (2011) added that literature circles incorporate a democratic element to the curriculum. Student choice, a learner-centered curriculum, and dialogue are elements of libertarian education that are fostered through the incorporation of literature circles in the classroom. Freire's conceptions of libertarian education and critical literacy are complementary. Critical literacy requires the reader to engage with the text and evoke a response, which can be discussed with others. Thus, reader response theory also frames this study.

Participating in a literature circle presents a prime opportunity for each member of the group to share his or her unique response to the text. Reader response theory holds that the text is open to multiple interpretations due to the affective responses of diverse readers (Rosenblatt, 1994). These personal responses are elaborated upon through the social exchange of ideas (McMahon & Raphael, 1997). Rosenblatt (1995) argued that readers cannot move to higher levels of literary analysis until they have processed, savored, and shared their personal responses to the text. Why is reader response so important? Cabral-Marquez (2015) explained, "It is only through sustained, active engagement with text that students will encounter natural, genuine opportunities to integrate all the skills and strategies that comprise the reading process and lead to growth in reading" (p. 464). Reader response is ingrained in literature circles. Each literature

circle meeting begins with a member sharing his or her personal response to the text (Daniels, 2002). The aforementioned theories are discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two. The theories of critical literacy and reader response meld together in literature circles, which were the focus of this study. An overview of this study is provided in the next section of text.

Overview of the Study

The methodology of this study is detailed in Chapter Three; however, a brief overview of this research study is given below. The site of this study was an intermediate-grades (i.e. fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-) classroom at a public school located in central Texas. In September 2016, the researcher conducted a whole-class administration of the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) as a pre-test. The RSPS was designed by Henk & Melnick (1995) to measure the reader self-efficacy of intermediate-grades students. Those students with the lowest RSPS pre-test scores were identified as potential participants for this study. The researcher and classroom teacher met to confer about the potential participants. In November 2016, the researcher began observing an eight-week cycle (excluding Thanksgiving and Christmas breaks) of literature circles. The researcher was a complete participant observer so as to fully interact with study participants (Creswell, 2013). As a complete participant observer, the researcher visited each literature circle in which a case (i.e. reluctant and/or struggling reader) was a member. To more deeply understand the influence of literature circles upon the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers, the researcher collected multiple sources of data.

The design of this study was an embedded multiple case study that necessitated the collection of both qualitative and quantitative forms of data. The researcher relied

primarily on qualitative data in determining the results and findings of this study and utilized quantitative data to enhance the qualitative data collected. Qualitative data was collected in the form of direct observations, documentation (i.e. participants' role sheets completed in preparation for each literature circle meeting), a focus group with study participants, two interviews (pre- and post-literature circles) with each case, and an interview with the classroom teacher. Quantitative data was collected through the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) developed by Henk & Melnick (1995) specifically for utilization with children in the intermediate-grades. The methodology of this study is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three. This study is significant because it addresses an existing gap in the literature.

Significance of this Study

The researcher identified a need for this study based on a lack of previous research regarding the influence of literature circles upon the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers. This study was thereby significant by addressing this gap in the literature. The age group of this study's participants was also significant. The researcher selected reluctant and/or struggling readers in the intermediate grades because polling of high school students as well as pre-service teachers conducted by Brinda (2011) revealed that students' negative attitudes towards reading began in the intermediate grades (i.e. fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-). It is thereby essential to identify reading instructional strategies that engage and motivate reluctant and/or struggling readers, especially for those in fourth- through sixth-grades. The location of this research study was significant as well.

This study was conducted at a low socioeconomic school within the state of Texas; therefore, the reading achievement scores of Texas’ fourth-graders are of particular note. A comparison of the national average to the average fourth-grade Texans’ scores between 2002 and 2015 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading achievement tests may be found below in Figure 1.2. In 2015, 36% of fourth-grade Texans scored below basic whereas only 31% scored at or above proficient on the NAEP reading assessment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b). Texas’ fourth-graders scored three points below the national average on the same assessment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b). From 2002 to 2015, Texas scored below the national average on six of the eight fourth-grade NAEP reading assessments (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b).

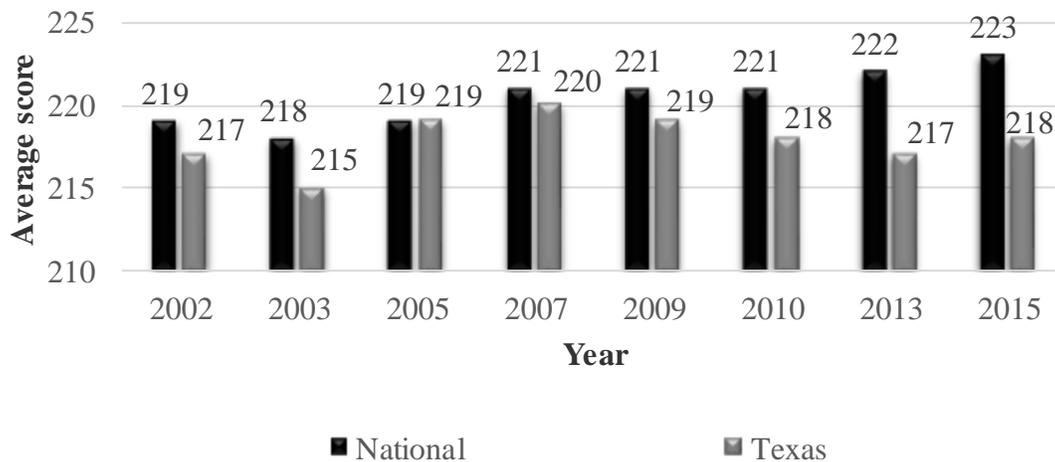


Figure 1.2. Comparison of national and Texas reading assessment scores on National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) for grade four, 2002-2015

The gap in performance between fourth-graders in Texas on the NAEP and the average U.S. fourth-grader is further exemplified in Figure 1.3 below. The figure below illustrates a comparison between the average Texas fourth-grader’s reading assessment score on the

2011 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)—the predecessor to the current Texas state annual examination, State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)—and the average U.S. fourth-grader’s reading assessment score on the 2011 NAEP (Bandeira de Mello, Bohrnstedt, Blakenship, & Sherman, 2015). Figure 1.3 denotes that the reading achievement of fourth-graders in Texas lagged behind that of fourth-graders nationwide.

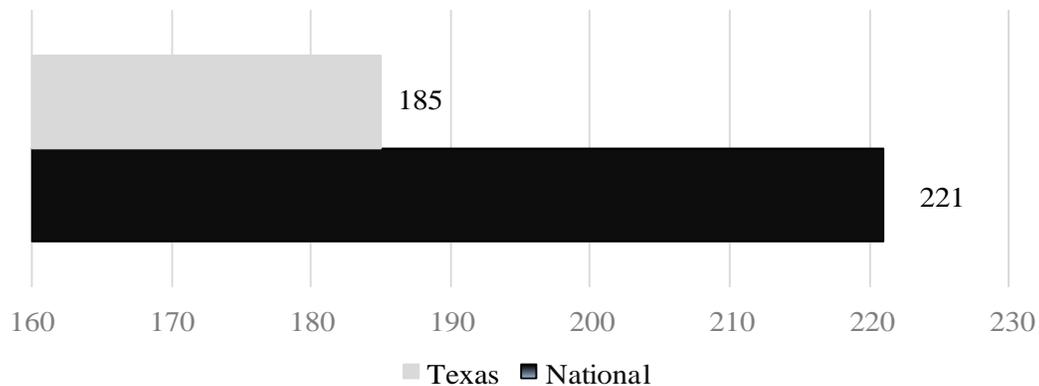


Figure 1.3. Estimated NAEP scale equivalent score for 2011 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) reading assessment, grade 4

As illustrated in Figure 1.3 above, the average fourth-grade Texan’s score on the 2011 TAKS reading assessment was equitable to a score of 185 on the 2011 NAEP, which was 23 points below the cut score of basic on the NAEP (Bandeira de Mello et al., 2015). Comparatively, the average U.S. fourth-grader scored 13 points above the cut score of basic on the 2011 NAEP reading assessment (Bandeira de Mello et al., 2015).

Again, it is imperative to identify a reading instructional strategy that successfully engages and motivates young readers. Literature circles present an opportunity for reluctant and/or struggling readers to further develop their literacy skills and utilize

reading strategies within the context of reading authentic literature. Throughout the design and implementation of this study, the researcher sought to minimize limitations as well as conduct research in the most ethical manner. However, the researcher is cognizant of a few limitations to this study as well as ethical considerations that could neither be minimized nor removed.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

A few limitations of this study could not be helped. The first limitation was that while this study was an embedded multiple case study, its primary research design was qualitative. Therefore, limitations associated with qualitative research affected this study. Due to the relatively small sample size of participants in this study, the findings from this research are not generalizable to a larger population. The sample utilized in this study was also one of convenience for the researcher. A colleague of the researcher taught fine-arts at the school where data was collected and thereby served as a gatekeeper in that she helped the researcher gain access to the school. Nevertheless, the school was also selected because it was fairly representative of a typical public school in central Texas. In addition to these study limitations, a few ethical considerations were addressed.

As with all research, ethical considerations were made in regards to this study. The most prevalent ethical consideration that was addressed was that of researcher bias. The researcher was obviously heavily invested in this study and hypothesized that literature circles would have a positive influence on the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers. However, the researcher took several steps to avoid researcher bias from compromising the rigor of this study. As suggested by Yin (2014), the researcher made a conscious effort to be sensitive to any contrary evidence that presented

itself during data analysis. In addition, two other doctoral students with concentrations in literacy provided an external check of the study as suggested by Creswell (2013). Apart from researcher bias, another ethical consideration involved the classroom teacher. The reluctant and/or struggling readers that served as cases in this study were identified, in part, based on the judgment of their classroom teacher. Thus, there was a potential for bias in identifying potential study participants on the part of the classroom teacher. Having addressed limitations as well as ethical considerations for this research study, the researcher defined terms essential to understanding this study below.

Definition of Terms

A few terms are especially important in regards to this research study. These terms are as follows:

1. Authentic literature: literature written in narrative or expository form that is not created for the explicit purpose of teaching reading skills
2. Critical literacy: process of critiquing the ideologies presented within text (Shor & Freire, 1987)
3. Literature circle: a small, peer-led discussion group whose members have chosen to read the same text (Daniels, 2002)
4. Reluctant reader: a reader who is capable of decoding text yet reads only in fulfilling the requirements to function in daily life (Chambers, 1969)
5. Reader response theory: a single text is open to multiple interpretations because each reader brings his or her unique perspective to reading (Rosenblatt, 1994)
6. Self-efficacy: one's personal belief that he or she can succeed at a particular task (Bandura, 1997)

7. Struggling reader: a student who reads below grade level (Hoyte, 2006)
8. Student engagement: active commitment to education through the melding of behavior, cognition, and emotion (Dee et al., 2013).

Knowledge of the aforementioned terms will help the reader to better comprehend this research study.

Summary

Through this study, the researcher explored the influence of a more student-centered approach to literacy instruction, literature circles, upon the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers. In an era of increased accountability measures, English language arts and reading instructional time has greatly increased. The ubiquity of English language arts and reading instruction, however, has not translated into increased reading achievement as indicated by national and international standardized assessments nor helped to foster a more positive affect towards reading. Increased English language arts and reading instruction has led to improved scores on state standardized assessments. However, when juxtaposed with national and international assessments, it is evident that the reading achievement of American children has not truly improved. Instead, more test preparation seems to underlie gains on state standardized assessments. In turn, students are not being well prepared to meet the demands of their postsecondary endeavors. This phenomenon led the researcher to explore the influence of a more student-centered instructional strategy, literature circles, upon the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers. More information about the literature circle instructional strategy and the theoretical framework for this study may be found in Chapter Two.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

In this chapter, the researcher further explored the current context of schooling in the United States. As mentioned in Chapter One, the present high-stakes accountability movement spurred the researcher to conduct this study. The researcher then synthesized the two theoretical frameworks that guided this study: critical literacy and reader response theory. Finally, the researcher provided more information on the student-centered literacy instructional strategy of literature circles in addition to the concept of self-efficacy.

In an accountability-driven era, the literacy achievement gap continues to widen. Reading achievement in the United States is average at best as indicated by scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). In 2015, the average fourth-grader scored 223 points on a 500-point scale on the NAEP reading assessment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016a). This score indicates that the reading level of the average fourth-grader is above the cut score of basic yet below the cut score for proficient (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016a). Further analysis of the 2015 NAEP reading assessment, however, reveals discrepancies in reading achievement between diverse student groups. The average scores on the 2015 NAEP reading assessment of the selected subpopulations discussed below are found in Figure 2.1. White fourth-grade students scored higher than the national average with a score of 232 whereas Black and Latino students averaged scores below the cut score of basic at 206 and 208, respectively

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2016a). The reading achievement of Black and Latino students is of note as racial/ethnic minorities comprise the majority student population in most urban districts and will be the nation’s majority school-population by 2025 (Aizenman, 2008). The achievement of students with learning disabilities and English Language Learners was also below the cut score of basic with average scores of 187 and 189, respectively (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016a).

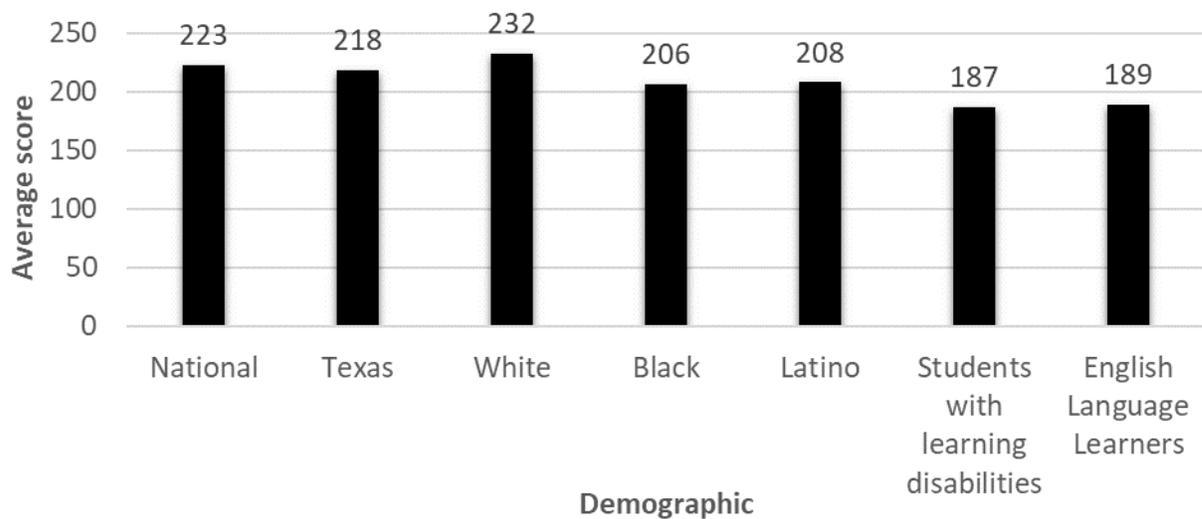


Figure 2.1. 2015 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) fourth-grade reading assessment scores

Kelley, Wilson, & Koss (2012) wrote, “Many of the nation’s current literacy problems stem from students’ lack of reading skills and strategy knowledge” (p. 79). Therefore, the statistics found above in Figure 2.1 are disheartening and exemplify the existence of a literacy achievement gap for Blacks, Latinos, students with learning disabilities, and English Language Learners when compared to the average scores of their White and/or “typical” peers. The incongruent academic performance of different groups of students is referred to as the *literacy achievement gap* (Teale, Paciga, & Hoffman,

2007). In addition to widening the literacy achievement gap, school curriculum continues to narrow while teacher and student autonomy are lost in the current accountability-driven era.

The emphasis on high-stakes accountability measures limits curriculum, instruction, and the quality of the school experience (Teale, Paciga, & Hoffman, 2007). The weight of high-stakes testing resulted in a decrease in both teacher and student autonomy. McMurrer (2007) found that since enacting No Child Left Behind, language arts and mathematics instruction increased whereas social studies, science, and fine-arts instruction decreased. Undoubtedly, student autonomy is affected by essentially limiting the school curriculum to one that heavily emphasizes those content areas that are primarily assessed on high-stakes standardized tests (i.e. mathematics and English language arts and reading). Similarly, the percentage of teachers who perceived low autonomy in their classrooms increased from the 2003-2004 school year to the 2011-2012 school year (Sparks & Malkus, 2015). This research study sought to foster student autonomy through the student-centered approach to literacy instruction via literature circles while also building the reader self-efficacy of intermediate-grades students.

This chapter describes the current context of schooling and literacy before exploring literature circles as a means of integrating critical literacy and reader response theory in the English language arts and reading classroom. The characteristics and research-based benefits, both affective and academic, of literature circles are described in this chapter. Research, however, on the influence of literature circle participation on the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers is limited. Thus, this study sought to address a gap in the literature as the researcher explored the influence of

literature circles upon the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers. First, the current state of schooling fosters a culture in which both teachers and students are disempowered.

The Current State of Schooling

To best understand the purpose of this study, it is important to frame it within the context of contemporary schooling. The current era of accountability-driven schooling largely adheres to the curricular ideology of social efficiency. Under social efficiency ideology, the purpose of education is to meet societal needs by training children to become contributing members of society (Schiro, 2012). Consequently, curriculum is restricted to that which children must be able to know and do to function later in life as adults (Schiro, 2012), principally as future contributors to the economy. Subsequently, the teacher's role is that of a manager of student learning (Schiro, 2012). Social efficiency curricular ideology pervades low socioeconomic and/or schools labeled "at-risk," as determined by accountability measures. Though social efficiency ideology emerged in the early twentieth century, its influence persists today.

Social efficiency ideology manifests itself today under a new guise. Apple (2006) termed the current heavy emphasis on accountability and testing in schools as *new managerialism*. Under new managerialism, knowledge is restricted to that which is thought to aid the economy or boosts test scores (Apple, 2016). Additionally, "corporate-style accountability procedures" (p. 130) reign, teacher autonomy is reduced, and schools who fail to perform well are shamed (Apple, 2016). According to Anderson (2009), children in third- through eighth-grades bear the brunt of the consequences of increased accountability because across all states children in these grade levels are given

standardized tests intended to measure their knowledge of mathematics and English language arts and reading. The curriculum in third through eighth grades is subsequently limited to what is assessed on high-stakes tests. Increasing standardization, Nieto (2015) argued, is especially dangerous as U.S. schools are becoming increasingly diverse. New managerialism has not only restricted the curriculum but also hinders autonomy in the classroom.

The effects of new managerialism are especially detrimental to teachers and students. In responding to a narrowed curriculum, teachers report moving away from student-centered instruction to teacher-centered instruction because it better correlates with state-mandated curriculum and assessment (McNeil, 2000). Some reports indicate that as much as 30% of new teachers leave the profession within five years (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Twenty-three teachers who remained in the profession were interviewed by Nieto (2015), who described their perceptions of new managerialism below:

These teachers believe deeply in U.S. public education as the foundation of a democratic society. Yet they recognize that many so-called reform policies are not really about providing a better and more equitable education for all students; instead, these policies often favor the corporations that profit from those policies and the foundations supporting them (p. 58).

The impact of new managerialism undoubtedly affects students as well. Turnipseed & Darling-Hammond (2015) wrote, “There are few incentives in the system for teachers and students to explore subjects in deep, meaningful, and engaging ways that would develop critical thinking, communication, and creative abilities” (p. 2). Restricting the curriculum limits students’ abilities to pose new questions, investigate problems, and create solutions (Turnipseed & Darling-Hammond, 2015). In addition to being supported

by prominent corporations, new managerialism and social efficiency ideology seem to be reinforced by our nation's judicial system.

The curricular ideology of social efficiency seemingly garnered support from courts across the U.S. In response to school finance litigation, the courts have surmised that not only is education not a federal constitutional right (Friedman & Solow, 2013) but also that schools need only provide children an *adequate education* (The Campaign for Educational Equality, 2006). An adequate education is defined as “the preparation of students to function productively as voters, jurors, and citizens of a democratic society and to be able to compete effectively in the economy” (Nelson, Palonsky, & McCarthy, 2013, p. 74). The definition of an adequate education epitomizes the purpose of schooling under the social efficiency model. An education that is more than adequate does not simply train children to fulfill their future roles as employees or as citizens exercising their right to vote or serving on a jury. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1947) epitomized education as “to teach one to think intensively and to think critically...Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education. The complete education gives one not only power of concentration, but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate” (n.p.). As such, an adequate education may hinder students from reaching their full potential by failing to incorporate students' interests and innate curiosities in the curriculum as well as failing to contribute to their non-cognitive development. Dr. King (1947) warned, “Education which stops with efficiency may prove the greatest menace to society” (n.p.) Despite the support of educational gatekeepers, by providing only an adequate education to all students, we may be failing some.

The term *achievement gap* often refers to the disparity in academic achievement between racial and ethnic groups (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). However, the achievement gap can refer to differences in academic achievement across diverse groups based on socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, first language, etc. (National Education Association, 2015). In regards to the racial/ethnic achievement gap, The Equity and Excellence Commission (2013) stated that the average Black eighth-grade student's academic performance is at the 19th percentile of his or her White peers. Similarly, the average Latino eighth-grade students' academic performance is at the 26th percentile of his or her White peers (The Equity and Excellence Commission, 2013). Regarding socioeconomic status, the achievement gap between low socioeconomic children and their wealthier peers is 30-40% greater for children born in 2001 than for children born twenty-five years earlier (Reardon, 2011). Essentially, the achievement gap between children of different socioeconomic statuses has widened in a mere generation. The researcher argues that the widening of the achievement gap may be influenced by increased accountability mandates, limiting education to one that is merely adequate, and influenced by the prevalence of social efficiency ideology. Brazilian educator and literacy activist Paulo Freire (2014) offered an alternative to a merely adequate education in his work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Freire's conception of literacy education, in particular, is one of two theories that framed this study.

Theoretical Framework

The framework of this study consisted of critical literacy and reader response theory. An explanation of each of the two theories that framed this study may be found

below. An abundance of scholarly literature on critical literacy exists; therefore a brief synopsis of the literature is presented below.

Critical Literacy

Shor (1999) defined *literacy* as “social action through language use that develops us as agents inside a larger culture” (p. 1). As a channel for social action, literacy therefore is not neutral. According to Bruner (1986), “Language necessarily imposes a perspective in which things are viewed and a stance toward what we view” (p. 121). Unfortunately, literacy can be utilized as a tool of domination by which to subvert the interests of others (McLaren & Lankshear, 1993). Within the context of schooling, Fine (1993) and Goodlad (1984) found that both students and administrators can be silenced via top-down curricula, standardized tests, and commercial textbooks. Thus, critical literacy emerged as a more democratic response to the more restrictive conventional approach to language arts (Shor, 1997).

What is critical literacy? According to Aronowitz and Giroux (1985), critical literacy affirms that knowledge is a social construction stemming from norms and values that serve specific economic, political, and social interests. Therefore, critical literacy involves questioning power relations, discourses, and identities (Shor, 1999). Critical literacy utilizes means of communication (such as print), to analyze, critique, and transform the norms, rules, and practices that govern daily life (Luke, 2004). Comber (1993) wrote, “Critical literacy involves both consciousness-raising about the discourses of dominant cultures and taking action to resist, expose, and overturn these discourses” (p. 74). Thus, it is imperative that one read both “the word and the world” to be cognizant

of the information that he or she absorbs, which consequently affects him or her (Freire, 1972).

In terms of schooling, Kretovics (1985) wrote that critical literacy provides students “with the conceptual tools necessary to critique and engage society along with its inequalities and injustices” (p. 51). Critical literacy affirms that how one reads the world is influenced by circumstances such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, etc. (Giroux, 1993). Consequently, critical literacy is a means of legitimizing student experience (Giroux, 1987). Critical literacy therefore not only involves analyzing texts but also affirms the influence of one’s various cultural identities upon his or her interpretation of them. Shor (1999) wrote, “When we are critically literate, we examine our ongoing development, to reveal the subjective positions from which we make sense of the world and act in it” (p. 1). Thus, critical literacy melds together textual analysis, discourse, and social, political, and cultural debate (Luke, 2012). By respecting the plurality of interpretation, critical literacy lends itself to democratic education.

Freirean critical literacy could be considered an extension of libertarian, or democratic, education. Freire was a strong advocate of literacy. He viewed literacy as a means through which people could liberate themselves by problematizing their world to change it (Janks et al., 2014). Freire advocated for problem-posing education as an alternative to the banking concept of education. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2014), Freire insisted that most schools operate under the *banking concept of education* (p. 74). Under the banking concept of education, students are passive, empty receptacles to be filled with knowledge by their expert teachers. The banking concept of education thrives in our current educational system, which as previously mentioned, promotes the social

efficiency curricular ideology. In contrast, problem-posing education requires learners to respond not only intellectually but also in action to a challenging, concrete situations (Freire, 2014). Learners may investigate and act upon an array of real-world issues through problem-posing education, which thereby contributes to the pluralism present in the democratic classroom. Instead of emulating a little factory, as under the banking concept of education, the democratic classroom is a community of learners. As such, the classroom community is pluralistic yet open, respectful, and attentive to social justice (Morrison, 2008). Schools must proactively create a community in which multiple perspectives are welcomed and shared to foster democracy (Greene, 1982).

Critical literacy is grounded in a commitment to democratic education (McLaren & Lankshear, 1993). Critical literacy is a form of problem-posing education that is rooted in dialogue within the classroom community (Rogers & Mosley-Wetzel, 2013). Dialogue is largely absent from the banking concept of education, but it is vital to critical literacy. In contrast to maximizing student growth through education, the banking model of education disempowers, disengages, and dehumanizes students (Morrison, 2009). To combat the banking model of education, Freire (2014) advocated for the utilization of cultural circles in which learners dialogue to name, frame, and solve real-world problems. These cultural circles enable learners to engage in praxis, which involves both reflecting and acting upon the world (Freire, 2014). Dialogue is at the heart of praxis. Through dialogue, learners engage critically with ideas and student voice begins to emerge in the classroom (Yannuzzi & Martin, 2014). While student voice in the classroom seems like a given, Morrison (2008) reminds us that students may be so accustomed to passively receiving knowledge that they are afraid to let their voices be heard. Even when dialogue

is permitted, some students may refrain from letting their voices be heard because what is of importance to them is undervalued in their classrooms (Ma'ayan, 2010). The transition to dialogic practice can be complicated at times because both students and teachers have grown so accustomed to the heavy presence of teacher voice in the classroom (Shor, 1999). Student voice and participation in learning are encouraged through critical literacy (Giroux, 1987), however, which creates a sense of agency.

Critical literacy is an approach to literacy instruction that offers a sense of agency so that people not only resist the coercive effects of literacy but also accomplish goals that are important to them (Rogers & Mosley-Wetzel, 2013). Freire and Macedo (1987) wrote, “[A]s a social construction, literacy not only names experiences considered to be important to a given society, it also sets off and defines through the concept of illiterate what can be termed ‘the experience of the other’” (p. 12). Consequently, Giroux (1993) stated that critical literacy is important to valuing the identities of “others.” Similarly, McLaren & Lankshear (1993) asked, “How can we refrain from keeping the “Other” mute before the ideals of our own discourse?” (p. 401). The problem-posing nature of critical literacy thus lends itself well to advancing social justice for those that are marginalized and disenfranchised through literacy (Luke, 2012).

Critical literacy has value in the English language arts and reading classroom. McLaughlin & DeVogd (2004) wrote that critical literacy “rais[es] questions about whose voices are represented in the text, whose voices are missing, and who gains and who loses by the reading of the text” (p. 52). In the English language arts and reading classroom in which critical literacy thrives, students research language, explore minority culture constructions of literacy and language use, and problematize texts (Comber,

1993). Teachers can remind their students that authors and illustrators make specific decisions about how to represent reality in narrative text as well as what kind of knowledge and information to present in expository text (Comber, 1993). While reading a text through the lens of critical literacy, Freebody & Luke (1990) suggested that readers presume one of four roles: (1) code breaker—How do I crack this?, (2) text participant—What does this mean?, (3) text user—What do I do with this here and now?, and (4) text analyst—What does all this do to me? Curriculum focused on critical literacy capitalizes upon what students find troubling, their questions, and their passions to not only capture their attention but also explore issues of significance to them (Vasquez, 2014). Critical literacy can truly thrive in a classroom in which varied responses to text are both valued and encouraged, which is why reader response theory also framed this study.

Reader Response Theory

Reader response theory advocates for individual, and therefore, pluralistic, interpretations of a text. Reader response theorists, however, disagree on the extent to which texts allow for unique interpretations. Reader response theorists typically fit into three categories; the first holds that authors utilize literary conventions to guide the reader's interpretation of the text (Brooks & Browne, 2012). This category of reader response theory seems to align most with its predecessor, *New Criticism*. Proponents of *New Criticism* believe that the reader must identify the literary qualities of the text to glean meaning (Gallop, 2007). Fish (1980) asserted that in ignoring the reader's construction of meaning, *New Criticism* failed to account for multiple interpretations of a single text. Thus, the second category of reader response theory holds that reading is quite subjective since literary interpretation results from the reader's unique

circumstances (Brooks & Browne, 2012). Bleich (1976), for example, insisted that a reader's response to a text is influenced by his or her race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, age, familial situation, etc. This study was influenced by Louise Rosenblatt's theory of reader response in which the two aforementioned categories intersect.

Reader response theory originated in the work of literary theorist and educator Louise Rosenblatt (Connell, 1996). According to Rosenblatt (1994), both the reader and text connect to construct meaning. Reader response theory further suggests that literature is a co-creation of both the author and reader (Daniels & Steineke, 2004). Subscribers to reader response theory hold that students can contribute significant and critical observations about a text (Boyle, 2000). Rosenblatt viewed reading as a negotiation between both the text and the reader (Brooks & Browne, 2012). Furthermore, reading is a transactional process between the reader and text at a particular time within the context of particular circumstances (Rosenblatt, 1982). The response of each reader, therefore, is individual and personal (Cooper, Robinson, Slansky, & Kiger, 2015). Due to this subjectivity, multiple and valid interpretations of a single text emerge (Boyle, 2000). One of the primary benefits of reader response theory is that it allows for the reader to interpret the text in part from his or her own unique perspective as opposed to solely subscribing to the interpretation put forth by literary experts. Encouraging each reader's unique interpretation of the text is not the only benefit of reader response theory, however.

There are many benefits to encouraging reader response in the English language arts and reading classroom. Literacy activities that encourage reader response include

interactive read-alouds, journaling, and reading conferences (Soares, 2010). As students respond to literature, they thoughtfully question the text and read critically (Boyle, 2000). As previously mentioned, reader response activities provide time for students to wonder about the text as opposed to finding absolutes and/or already acquired meanings (Moutray, Pollard, & McGinley, 2001). Thereby students are valued as readers, which increases their confidence as their ideas are recognized as meritorious (Boyle, 2000). Reader response theory, thus, helps to foster democratic education in the English language arts and reading classroom.

Reader response theory enhances critical literacy. As previously mentioned, critical literacy allows for pluralism in the classroom in both recognizing and validating the array of perspectives held by students. Proponents of reader response theories acknowledge that readers are active and bring their experience, knowledge, and beliefs to the text (Park, 2012). According to Holland (1975), text is read in accordance with the reader's identity theme, which influences every aspect of his or her life. McLaughlin (1995) argued that a reader's response to literature often reveals how the reader perceives him or herself, others, and his or her environment. However, as McCormick (1994) stated, "The influence of readers' beliefs and values...is often invisible to them until they encounter interpretations that differ from their own" (p. 79). A reader's worldview, and consequently his or her interpretive lens, becomes public as he or she participates in a community of readers (Park, 2012). Literature circles, therefore, present a prime opportunity to foster reader response (Soares, 2010).

Literature Circles

Literature circles are essentially book clubs that have been structured for classroom settings. Educators value literature circles because, while there are certain defining characteristics of literature circles, they are largely free to choose how they implement literature circles in their classrooms. In addition to allowing for freedom in instructional decision-making, literature circles are beneficial for students. Literature circles have been shown to positively affect the classroom community, foster students' growth in literacy, benefit students affectively, and particularly impact diverse students.

Characteristics of Literature Circles

Prior to delving into the benefits of literature circles, it is important to first know the origins of the literature circle. The term *literature circle* originated with Harste, Short, and Burke (1989). However, the literature circle pre-dates its name. Literature circles are modeled after the book clubs in which many adult readers participate; however, literature circles are typically more structured to scaffold student learning. Daniels (2002) characterized literature circles as “small, peer-led discussion groups whose members have chosen to read the same story, poem, article, or book” (p.2). Teachers who incorporate literature circles in their classroom have freedom in regards to their instructional decision-making, although, all literature circles have several common distinctive features.

While there are variations of the literature circle, several traits compose its core. Students choose the text to be discussed from a limited selection typically centered around a theme or genre (Burns, 1998). Each literature circle reads a different text, and due to student choice, literature circle membership is typically heterogeneous (Daniels,

2002). After initially scaffolding literature circle participation, the teacher acts as a facilitator (Daniels, 2002) as each small group assumes responsibility for the management of their literature circle (Burns, 1998). Ideally, literature circle discussions are natural conversations about the text, yet some teachers may require members to formally prepare for each literature circle meeting, particularly when students are fairly inexperienced with literature circles (Daniels, 2002). Daniels (2002) recommended that literature circle members assume a role such as Questioner, Connector, Literacy Luminary, Illustrator, Vocabulary Enricher, etc. to guide their reading and subsequently, their discussion of the text. Conventionally, a student assumes a different role for each literature circle meeting (e.g. the student may be Questioner during meeting one, Illustrator during meeting two, and so forth). Regardless of the details, there are many academic and affective benefits of literature circles.

Benefits of Literature Circles

The benefits of literature circles in the classroom abound. Literature circles help to create a non-threatening community of learners (Wiesendanger & Tarpley, 2010). Thus, the classroom climate evolves into one that is more cooperative, responsible, and pleasurable (Burns, 1998). Literature circles also enable students of varying learning styles to shine (Daniels, 2002). Undoubtedly, literature circles meet the needs of students whose primary learning style is linguistic, but literature circles also meet the needs of students with an interpersonal style who thrive from more cooperative learning opportunities. Children with a kinesthetic learning style can thrive particularly in the role of an artist as they illustrate selections of the text. Similarly, auditory learners profit from discussing the text with their peers. In addition to the affective benefits of literature

circles upon classroom dynamics, the literature circle is a means of student-centered instruction (Cameron, Murray, Hull, & Cameron, 2012) and thereby increases student engagement (Almasi, 1995). As students collaborate and discuss the text with their peers, the literature circle may become a zone of proximal development (King, 2001). The zone of proximal development was conceptualized by Vygotsky (1978) and refers to the zone in which an individual can accomplish a task with scaffolding from a more capable peer or adult. Literature circle participation supports higher-order thinking (Cameron et al., 2012), and interpretive, student-led literature-based discussions lead to higher cognitive growth (Almasi, 1995). Students' academic problem-solving and decision-making also improve through their participation in literature circles (Blum, Lipsett, & Yocom, 2002). Aside from having a positive effect on students' overall academic growth and the classroom community, literature circles also facilitate students' literacy development.

Literature circles have been shown to enhance students' growth in literacy. The goal of literacy instruction is to equip students with the skills needed to read authentic literature (Cooper et al., 2015). Authentic literature is commonly referred to as trade books and denotes narrative and expository texts in their original forms (Cooper et al., 2015) as opposed to basal readers and other texts created specifically for teaching reading skills. Literature circles provide opportunities for students to further develop their literacy skills with authentic literature. Similarly, students read rich literature that stimulates and engages their intellect (Long & Grove, 2003) while participating in literature circles. A participant learns how to be a reader (Meek, 1982) as his or her experiences mirror those of readers in the real-world (Cameron et al., 2012; Marchiando, 2013) in that they read and discuss a book of their choice. Each literature circle forms around the book chosen by

its members after previewing a selection of texts offered by their classroom teacher. Conversing about a book helps students to develop reading strategies (Pearson, 2010) such as forging connections, engaging in questioning, inferencing, summarizing, and evaluating (Daniels & Steineke, 2004). Similarly, text-based conversations improve students' prosody (i.e. expressive reading), increase their stamina and perseverance, and develop critical literacy skills (Pearson, 2010). Similarly, literature circles foster discussion of literary elements present in the text (Wiesendanger & Tarpley, 2010), again with an element of authenticity. Teachers who elect to have their students prepare role sheets in preparation for their literature circle meetings further facilitate their students' literacy development. In preparing for their respective roles, students engage in identifying important information, inferencing, making connections, monitoring and clarifying, predicting, questioning, summarizing, and visualizing (Whittaker, 2012). These processes are research-based strategies for constructing meaning from text (Cooper et al., 2015). Unsurprisingly, Clarke & Holwadel (2007) found that literature circles increase students' reading comprehension. Literature circles increase students' motivation to read as well (Stein & Beed, 2004). Similarly, participating in literature circles increases children's oral language as well as reading and writing achievement (Anderson & Corbett, 2008). Literacy, which consists of students' oral language, reading, and writing skills, is essential to school success. In addition to facilitating students' growth in literacy, literature circles have many affective benefits.

As previously mentioned, literature circles positively influence the classroom community, and they have affective benefits on students. Stein & Beed (2004) reported that literature circle participants' social skills improved as they learned to both listen to

and value others. Literature circles allow for discussion in a supportive context (Potenza-Radis, 2010) that in turn encourages risk-taking (Wiesendanger & Tarpley, 2010).

Membership in literature circles helps to foster relationships within the classroom as “students helped one another more, learned more, and enjoyed being in the group more” (Burns, 1998, p. 125). Participants also begin to see diverse perspectives as they listen to their peers’ contributions to discussion (Cameron et al., 2012), which is due in part to the heterogeneous grouping involved in literature circles. Daniels (2002) elaborated:

Effective reading discussion groups tend to see diversity as an asset—the more people talk about books, the more they want to have a *range* of responses, ideas, and connections in the group. It’s not as much fun if everyone has the same experiences, stories, connections to share; discussions are richer if people *aren’t* all alike (p. 37).

When multicultural literature is involved, literature circles can also address student diversity in ways that may otherwise be neglected in traditional instruction (Adomat, 2014). Literature circles are also particularly adept at meeting diverse student needs.

Literature circles benefit an array of students. Avci & Yuksel (2011) found that literature circle participation is beneficial for students with low reading comprehension. Reluctant readers are especially motivated to participate in literature circles as they are presented with the opportunity to make their own decisions (Burns, 1998) in regards to choosing the text and managing their small groups. Literature circles also foster reluctant readers’ enjoyment of reading (Cameron et al., 2012). As previously mentioned, the small group nature of literature circles encourages students to take risks. This is especially significant for students with disabilities who engage in risk-taking as they make valued contributions to discussion (Eeds & Wells, 1989; Goatley, Brock, & Raphael, 1995; Blum et al., 2002). The reading comprehension and social skills of students with learning

disabilities improve with literature circle participation as well (Whittaker, 2012). Students identified as academically at-risk exhibited strong growth in terms of their social and leadership skills after participating in literature circles (Sportsman et al., 2011). In a study conducted by Goatley et al. (1995), the researchers found that both an English Language Learner and a struggling reader emerged as leaders of their literature circle groups. For English Language Learners, small group discussions present an opportunity to further develop their conversational skills; opportunities to hone conversational skills in a school setting are essential for English Language Learners (Gee, 1992). The findings from a few previous research studies on literature circles are particularly relevant to this study and are shared below.

Self-Efficacy of Readers

No matter the content area, self-efficacy plays a major role in learning. Albert Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as one's personal belief that he or she can succeed at a given task. Self-efficacy is task-specific (McCabe, 2003). Thus, a student could have low self-efficacy in one content area but high self-efficacy in another. Self-efficacy influences motivation. An individual's engagement in a task, the amount of effort put forth towards accomplishing it, and persistence when faced with difficulties correlates with his or her self-efficacy (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). Unsurprisingly, self-efficacy is one determinant of a student's reading outcomes.

Self-efficacy is influential upon one's motivation to read. One aspect of motivation to read is categorized as competence and efficacy beliefs (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). Expectedly, struggling readers are likely to have low reader self-efficacy (Ferrara, 2005). Students with low self-efficacy are unlikely to apply their learning in a

context different from the one in which they initially acquired their knowledge and skills (McCabe, 2003). Thus, it is imperative that struggling readers come to believe that they can have reading success when they apply the skills and strategies that they were taught (McCabe & Margolis, 2001). Self-efficacy can influence the likelihood of a struggling reader applying the reading skills and strategies that he or she has learned. Research suggests that the reading outcomes of students with low reading comprehension yet higher levels of self-efficacy were more likely to improve upon receiving reading intervention as opposed to their peers with lower self-efficacy (Cho et al., 2015). Teachers can foster reader self-efficacy through literature circles.

The utilization of literature circles is promising for improving reader self-efficacy. One means of promoting the self-efficacy of struggling readers is to allow them to choose the text they want to read (Ferrara, 2005). As previously mentioned, membership in each literature circle forms around the students' choice of book. McCabe & Margolis (2001) suggested that a student's self-efficacy can be built through achieving success in moderately difficult yet meaningful tasks. Functioning in an assigned role can build students' self-efficacy as they contribute to the success of their literature circle by sharing their unique perspectives on the text. For example, a student in the Connector role succeeds in identifying connections between the text and his or herself, other texts, and world. Similarly, an Illustrator brings a climactic scene from the text to life. Readers with low self-efficacy benefit from observing their peers successfully engage in reading behaviors (McCabe & Margolis, 2001), and the cooperative nature of literature circles enables students to glean good reading habits and skills from observing other literature circle members interact with the text. The Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS),

developed by Henk & Melnick (1995), was designed to measure the reader self-efficacy of intermediate-grades readers and was utilized in this study. Previous research, however, on self-efficacy and literature circles is limited, which presented a need for this study.

Other Relevant Studies

Various facets of literature circles have been previously studied. Two studies especially relevant to this one are described below. Ma'ayan (2010) studied the effects of the literature circle experience upon a middle school girl labeled as at-risk. Ma'ayan (2010) found that participating in a literature circle enabled Erika (pseudonym) to showcase her literacy. Unfortunately, outside of literature circles, Erika was often discouraged from demonstrating her literacy at school. Consequently, Ma'ayan (2010) wrote of the importance of literature circles in helping students to further their literacy by reading and writing about experiences that they themselves value. In contrast to Ma'ayan's study of an at-risk student's experiences with literature circles, Soares studied the literature circle experiences of more academically successful students.

Soares (2010) investigated the effects of literature circles upon high-ability students. Participants in Soares' (2010) study began to celebrate diversity as they moved towards cultural connectedness and looked beyond difference. Through literature circles, students become critically literate by reflecting upon the world and using the power of language to change it (Soares, 2010). The students did so by identifying how characters were represented and positioned or noting a lack of representation in the text (Soares, 2010). Subsequently, the students acted on injustice present in the text by composing alternative viewpoints and/or new texts (Soares, 2010). Soares' (2010) study exemplified the empowering nature of literature circles.

The studies conducted by Ma'ayan (2010) and Soares (2010) are particularly noteworthy. First, Ma'ayan's study (2010) provided evidence for what is perhaps the biggest benefit of literature circles—enabling all students to access literacy and feel intelligent. Soares (2010) study illustrated how literature circles exemplify critical literacy in a beneficial way. Both studies, one may argue, built the self-efficacy of their participants through literature circles.

The researcher acknowledges that previous dissertations and theses have studied various facets of literature circles. However, the present study contributes to the current body of scholarly literature because it utilized the Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995) to help quantify the influence of literature circle participation on the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers in the intermediate-grades.

As outlined further in Chapters Three and Four, the participants in this study were predominantly racial and ethnic minorities who attended a low socioeconomic public school. Therefore, studies regarding more student-centered approaches to literacy instruction are also of note. Teale, Paciga, & Hoffman (2007) wrote that a curriculum gap contributes to the presence of a literacy achievement gap between traditionally marginalized students and their White peers. The *curriculum gap* refers to the insufficient presence of curriculum elements necessary for reading and writing success (Teale, Paciga & Hoffman, 2007). Furthermore, the curriculum gap often leads to a failure to provide sufficient comprehension instruction, writing instruction, and/or instruction that develops children's general world knowledge (Teale, Paciga, & Hoffman, 2007). Walker-Dalhouse & Risko (2008) studied high-achieving urban schools and found that such schools utilize literacy strategies that require high student engagement, make content relevant to

students' lives, and view both cultural and linguistic differences as a resource. Peterson (2014) added that teachers should incorporate literature that reflects their students' backgrounds and subsequently provide a culturally responsive literacy curriculum.

Summary

Though prior research has been conducted on the benefits of literature circles, through this study, the researcher explored a dynamic of literature circles in which research is limited. This study explored the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers prior to and after engaging in literature circles. A study conducted by McElvain (2010) found that the Transactional Literature Circles program increased the self-efficacy of English Language Learners. Similarly, Anderson & Corbett (2008) found that the self-efficacy of students with learning disabilities also improved. Through this study, however, the researcher explored the self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers in a low socioeconomic, majority-minority school both before and after their participation in literature circles. This study was unique in that it explored the influence of integrating critical literacy and reader response theory through literature circles upon reluctant and/or struggling readers' self-efficacy in a low socioeconomic school. This study was needed not only to fill a gap in existing research on literature circles but also in response to the predominance of new managerialism in our current era of schooling.

The researcher identified a need for this study, particularly in an age in which new managerialism pervades. The current era is one of increasing accountability mandates, less teacher autonomy, and a narrowed curriculum. The culminating effect of these factors seems to be further marginalization of students as exemplified by a widening literacy achievement gap in terms of both race/ethnicity and socioeconomic status. The

researcher intends for the promising results and findings from this study, further explained in Chapter Four, to encourage a more student-centered alternative to narrowed literacy curriculum and instruction. Literature circles can bring critical literacy to the English language arts and reading classroom by valuing the varied perspectives of diverse students while simultaneously encouraging student autonomy in learning. Literature circles also provide students with an opportunity to engage in problem-posing education through critical literacy as they dialogue about real-world issues of importance to them. Similarly, literature circles present a prime opportunity to foster reader response as students' individual interpretations of the text are valued and shared. Critical literacy and reader response theory may combine in the context of literature circles to offer a student-centered, critical, and meaningful approach to literacy instruction. Literature circles offer many academic and affective benefits for all students.

As previously mentioned, the benefits of literature circles abound. The classroom dynamic becomes more communal, and students learn more as they are encouraged to take risks in a supportive environment. The literacy of all students further develops, especially for reluctant and/or struggling readers, English Language Learners, and students with learning disabilities. This study built upon the aforementioned theoretical framework and explored the influence of literature circles upon the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers. More specifics in regards to the research methodology that framed this study are provided in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

This study explored the influence of literature circles upon the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers. This study was conducted because the researcher was especially interested in learning more about the influence of this student-centered instructional strategy upon those readers who resist reading because of disinterest and/or its difficulty. The purpose of this embedded multiple case study was to understand the influence of literature circles upon the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers at a central Texas Montessori magnet school. The school at which data for this study was collected enrolled children in pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade. As mentioned in previous chapters, a literature circle is generally defined as a small, heterogeneous book club structured for a classroom setting. As described in Chapter Two, self-efficacy refers to the personal belief one has that he or she can succeed at a given task (Bandura, 1997). A reluctant reader is an individual who is capable of reading without encountering decoding problems yet is not inclined to read unless necessary for work or daily life (Chambers, 1969). A struggling reader reads below grade level (Hoyte, 2006). As discussed in Chapter Two, prior research has been conducted on the influence of literature circles upon the self-efficacy of English Language Learners and students with learning disabilities. However, research is limited on the influence of literature circles upon the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers, which thereby presented a need for this study.

The researcher outlines the methodology utilized to conduct this study in this chapter. First, the researcher describes the chosen research design prior to describing the population and sample, data collected, methods for data analysis, measures taken by the researcher to ensure the validity of the study, and study limitations.

Research Design

Every research study must adhere to the tenets of a research design that best suits the research questions. The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. How do literature circles influence the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers? (central research question)
2. How do reluctant and/or struggling readers describe themselves as readers after participating in literature circles and upon what do they base these descriptions? (first subquestion)
3. What, if any, characteristics of participating in literature circles do reluctant and/or struggling readers perceive as beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable? (second subquestion)
4. Do reluctant and/or struggling readers perceive themselves as having their voices heard during literature circle participation, and why do they say so? (third subquestion)

Quality studies select the research design that will most appropriately address the research question(s).

After considering the research questions, the researcher decided that an embedded multiple case study design was best for this study. This study embedded the collection of quantitative data within the traditional qualitative research design of case study. Yin

(2014) defined a case study as “an empirical study that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 16). More specifically, an embedded case study relies “on holistic data collection strategies for studying the main case and then call[s] upon surveys or other quantitative techniques to collect data about the embedded unit[s] of analysis” (Yin, 2014, p. 66). A multiple case study utilizes several case studies to illustrate an issue (Creswell, 2013). Multiple case studies are often considered to be more robust as they rely on evidence from several cases to make generalizations (Herriott & Firestone, 1983). Multiple case study was most appropriate for this study as each student identified as a reluctant and/or struggling comprised a single case. For data analysis, the researcher followed the recommendations set forth in Creswell (2013) by conducting within-case analysis to describe themes that emerged from each case and cross-case analysis in conducting a thematic analysis across cases. Before delving into an explanation of the data collected and analyzed, it is imperative to first understand the sample, or cases, that participated in this study.

Population and Sample

Understanding the school context, or population, is essential to this study. This study was conducted at a magnet school within a public-school district in central Texas. During the 2015-2016 school year, 654 students attended the school, serving children in pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade (Texas Education Agency, 2016). The school had a minority-majority student population, which means that most of its students were non-White. As of 2015-2016, the ethnic breakdown of the student population was 61.5% Latino, 16.7% Black, and 19.3% White (Texas Education Agency, 2016). It is also

important to note that 79.7% of the students were classified as economically disadvantaged, 12.8% were English Language Learners (ELL), and 50.8% were categorized as at-risk (Texas Education Agency, 2016). For 2015-2016, the school earned an accountability rating of *Met Standard* (Texas Education Agency, 2016). As noted in Chapter One, this school was selected as the site for data collection because a colleague of the researcher taught at the school and thereby served as a gatekeeper to study participants. Now that insight into this study's population has been given, the sample will now be described.

Each case within this multiple case study emerged from one classroom within the aforementioned school. The classroom included students across the intermediate-grades (i.e. fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-). The researcher elected to conduct this study in an intermediate-grades classroom because children at this age level are more likely to be in the concrete operational stage of Piaget's stages of cognitive development (Wood, Smith, & Grossniklaus, 2010). Children in the concrete operational stage tend to become less egocentric as well as increasingly aware of the uniqueness of their own thoughts and feelings (Wood, Smith, & Grossniklaus, 2010). The developmental level of this study's participants was of importance to the researcher. Due to the qualitative nature of this study and the collection of data through interviews, the researcher wanted the study participants to be at an age where they could express the depth of their thoughts and feelings both developmentally and verbally. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter One, students in the intermediate-grades are susceptible to developing negative attitudes towards reading. Even students who enjoy reading tend to read less as they progress from early elementary to middle school (O'Brien & Dillion, 2008). The intermediate grades

serve as a bridge between early elementary and middle school. Students were selected for participation in this study based upon a pre-identified criterion, which is described below.

Criterion-based purposeful sampling was utilized to identify study participants. Under criterion-based purposeful sampling, the researcher must “identify and select all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (Palinkas et al., 2013, p. 535). In this study, the criterion for each case was to be identified as a reluctant and/or struggling reader based on the results of his or her Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995) pre-test. More details on the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) are given later in this chapter. Briefly, the RSPS is an instrument designed to measure the reader self-efficacy of intermediate-grades students. A reluctant reader can read yet is not inclined to do so unless necessary for daily life (Chambers, 1969). Beers (1996) further categorized reluctant readers as either uncommitted or unmotivated. Uncommitted and unmotivated readers have several commonalities, which are: (1) failure to identify themselves as readers, (2) viewing reading as having a functional purpose, and (3) having efferent transactions with text (Beers, 1996). Rosenblatt (1994) described an efferent transaction as reading primarily to obtain information from a text as opposed to reading for aesthetic purposes. A struggling, or unskilled, reader is one who simply cannot read proficiently (Beers, 1996). Like uncommitted and unmotivated readers, unskilled readers do not self-identify as readers, view reading as primarily functional, and have efferent transactions with text (Beers, 1996). Regardless, reluctant readers may exhibit avoidance behaviors and/or put forth minimal effort towards a reading task (Kelley & Clausen-Grace, 2006). Struggling readers are perhaps more easily identifiable because they often read below grade level (Hoyte, 2006). Kelley et al. (2003) wrote that an estimated eight

million fourth-through twelfth-grade students struggle to read on grade level. The researcher elected to include both reluctant and/or struggling readers in this study because oftentimes the two are synonymous. Beers (1996) described a cycle in which a student does not enjoy reading and in turn begins to struggle due to refraining from practicing his or her reading skills. Consequently, this reifies the lack of reading enjoyment on the part of the student as he or she does not want to read because reading has become challenging for him or her (Beers, 1996). Data was collected on seven cases for the purposes of this study. In adhering to the principles of embedded multiple case study design, the researcher collected multiple forms of data.

Data Collection

Case study research demands the collection of multiple sources of data to build an in-depth understanding of the issue under study (Creswell, 2013). According to Yin (2014), data for case study research may be collected in the form of archival records, direct observations, documentation, interviews, participant observation, and physical artifacts. Collecting multiple forms of data allows for triangulation, or the use of varied and multiple sources of data to corroborate evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Corroborating evidence is imperative to highlighting a theme (Creswell, 2013). Triangulating data provides validity to a researcher's findings (Creswell, 2013). Over the course of this study, several forms of data were collected to facilitate triangulation: (1) Reader Self-Perception Scale scores, (2) interviews, (3) direct observations, (4) documentation, and (5) a focus group.

Reader Self-Perception Scale

As previously mentioned, this study utilized an embedded multiple case study design because quantitative data was collected within the context of the traditional qualitative research design of case study. The quantitative data collected in this study stemmed from the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS), which is found in Appendix G. Henk & Melnick (1995) devised the RSPS to measure reader self-efficacy. The RSPS was specifically created for utilization with intermediate-grades students (Henk & Melnick, 1992); thus, the RSPS was ideal for this study's participants. Four scales comprise the RSPS. The Progress scale measures the child's perceived reading performance in comparison with his or her past performance (Henk & Melnick, 1995). A child's perceived reading performance in comparison to his or her peers is measured by the Observational Comparison scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995). The Social Feedback scale seeks input from the child's teachers, classmates, and family (Henk & Melnick, 1995). Finally, the Physiological States scale measures the internal feelings experienced while reading (Henk & Melnick, 1995). The RSPS is normed, valid, and reliable (Henk & Melnick, 1995). A test that is normed indicates that it can be used to compare scores to the average performance of similar students (Rodriguez, 1997). Validity means that an instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Maxwell & Delaney, 2004). Reliability refers to the consistency of measurement or that two scores correlate (Kirk, 2008). Since the RSPS is normed, valid, and reliable, it was ideal for this study's quantitative data collection.

The researcher elected to embed the Reader Self-Perception Scale as the quantitative data source in this embedded multiple case study. The RSPS was

administered as a pre-test to study participants in September 2016, prior to their participation in the observed literature circles. Following their participation in literature circles, study participants were given the RSPS as a post-test in February 2017. The administration of the RSPS as a pre- and post-test allowed the researcher to make comparisons between participants' scores on both measures to quantitatively gauge the influence of literature circles upon reader self-efficacy. The RSPS was just one form of data that was collected for this study, however.

Interviews

Case studies are largely concerned with human affairs or actions; therefore, interviews are an essential source of evidence in case study research (Yin, 2014). As such, the researcher conducted individual interviews with all seven of the study participants and their classroom teacher. The researcher audiotaped each interview to ensure that the interviewees' responses were accurately recorded (Yin, 2014). In October 2016, an interview was conducted with each case prior to his or her participation in the observed literature circles. The questions comprising the interview protocol were developed by the researcher with the research questions in mind. Similarly, each case participated in an individual interview with the researcher following his or her participation in literature circles in February 2017. The protocols for both interviews with the identified cases may be found in Appendix H and Appendix Q, respectively.

Once the observed literature circles concluded, the researcher interviewed the classroom teacher to gauge her perception of the influence of literature circles upon the reader self-efficacy of each case. The classroom teacher—given the pseudonym, Mrs. Ian—was interviewed because she helped the researcher to identify potential participants

based upon their Reader Self-Perception Scale pre-test scores. The interview conducted with Mrs. Ian provided valuable insights into the researcher's findings, which are more thoroughly discussed in Chapter Four. Again, the researcher developed the questions that comprised the protocol for the interview with Mrs. Ian based upon the research questions. The interview protocol for the interview with the classroom teacher may be found in Appendix S. As previously mentioned, interviews are an integral source of data in case studies as are direct observations.

Direct Observations

The real-world setting of case study research allows for direct observation as a source of data by which to capture the social and environmental conditions relevant to the study (Yin, 2014). Angrosino (2007) described observation as a means of noting a phenomenon in the field based upon the observer's senses coupled with an instrument. In this study, the researcher assumed the role of a complete participant observer, which allowed for rapport-building and full interaction with the study participants (Creswell, 2013). The researcher visited each literature circle in which a study participant was a member. The observational protocol that the researcher devised based upon suggestions made by Creswell (2013) is found in Appendix I. The observational protocol was rather open-ended to allow for more flexibility for the researcher to record observations.

In addition to the observational protocol found in Appendix I, the researcher utilized a literature circle-specific observation checklist developed by Day et al. (2002). This observation checklist is divided into four categories that gauge the participant's understanding of literature-based discussions, interaction with group members, critical thinking, and literary content knowledge (Day et al., 2002). The researcher elected to use

this observation checklist (Appendix P) as a complement to the more open-ended observational protocol. The observation checklist was particularly useful to the researcher because it was designed specifically to record observations of literature circles. All direct observations occurred concurrently as each case participated in a literature circle. Daniels (2002) recommended using role sheets—described in greater detail below—to guide children’s participation in literature circles, particularly for those who have little to no prior experience with literature circles. These role sheets served as a form of documentation in this study.

Documentation

As previously mentioned, triangulation of data is a crucial step in validating study findings. Documentation is another means of corroborating information collected from other sources (Yin, 2014). In this study, documentation served as a tool to corroborate information gathered from direct observation, interviews, and a focus group session. Yin (2014) added that documentation is valuable in that it allows for making inferences that can clue the researcher into issues for further investigation. Over the course of this study, each literature circle member functioned in a specific role as envisioned primarily by Daniels (2002). The role of each participant was assigned to him or her by Mrs. Ian, and the role that each participant assumed changed from week-to-week. In preparation for his or her respective role, each literature circle member completed a correlating role sheet. Each member had a unique role to play in his or her literature circle.

Each literature circle member was expected to prepare for each meeting from a unique perspective, or role. The specific roles within the literature circle were dependent upon the number of children that comprised each group. The participants rotated roles so

that they had the chance to prepare for discussion from a different perspective for each literature circle meeting. The following roles created by Daniels (2002) were utilized: Discussion Director (formulates questions to lead the discussion), Connector (makes connections between text and personal life, world, and other texts), Literacy Luminary (identifies memorable and/or important passages for analysis), Artful Artist (illustrates a pivotal scene and/or character), Word Wizard (identifies difficult, interesting, and/or puzzling words), and Summarizer (summarizes the text selection). The role sheets that each case prepared for his or her respective literature circle meeting served as documentation in this study and are found in Appendices J through O. A description of the final source of data that was collected may be found below.

Focus Group

The researcher conducted a focus group session for which six of the seven cases were present. This focus group session occurred following their participation in literature circles. Krueger & Casey (2009) described a focus group as a small group discussion about some aspect of the case study during which the researcher tries to obtain the views of each person in the group. The purpose of the focus group was to gain insight from the study participants collectively regarding their perceptions of literature circles and the influence of literature circles upon them as readers. Questions posed to the collective participants during the focus group are found in Appendix R. Data collected through the focus group session was triangulated with the aforementioned interviews, direct observations, and documentation.

Data Analysis

The research design of this study was an embedded multiple case study. As previously mentioned, quantitative data was collected within the context of the traditional qualitative design of a multiple case study. Therefore, the analysis of both the qualitative and quantitative data collected is described below.

Qualitative Data

This embedded multiple case study was primarily qualitative in nature; thus, the analysis of the qualitative data collected is described in greater detail below. In analyzing the qualitative data, the researcher followed the data analysis spiral suggested by Creswell (2013). The first step was to organize the data (Creswell, 2013), and the researcher used the NVivo 11 software to organize the collected qualitative data for analysis. Once the data was organized, the researcher read the qualitative data in its entirety before engaging in memoing. Creswell (2013) described memoing as a process of noting “short phrases, ideas, or key concepts that occur to the reader” (p. 183). Memoing enabled the researcher to reflect on and categorize the big ideas present in the data (Creswell, 2013). The researcher then engaged in coding the data into smaller categories of information, again as recommended by Creswell (2013). Themes that emerged from the coding process were then identified. Creswell (2013) defined a theme as a “broad unit of information that consist(s) of several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (p. 186). The researcher completed the data analysis spiral for each case in this study in preparation for within-case data analysis.

In terms of within-case analysis, the researcher analyzed the collected data through pattern matching. Pattern matching involves comparing “an empirically based

pattern” (Yin, 2014, p. 143) that evolves from the collected data to a predicted pattern made prior to data collection. Pattern matching can only occur in a descriptive case study if the researcher stated the predicted pattern(s) prior to collecting data (Yin, 2014). Prior to collecting data, the researcher predicted that the following patterns would emerge during data analysis. The researcher predicted that participation in literature circles would have a positive influence on the reluctant and/or struggling readers participating in this study by improving their reader self-efficacies (central research question). The researcher likewise predicted that after participating literature circles, the cases would describe themselves as more motivated to read and/or state that they find reading more enjoyable because of the student-centered nature of literature circles (first subquestion). Similarly, the researcher predicted that the cases would identify discussing a book of their choice with their peers and the ability to share their unique perspectives due to the elements of student choice, cooperative nature, and self-management as beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable (second subquestion). The researcher predicted that the cases would perceive that their voices were heard during their participation in a literature circle due to the conversational nature of meetings as well as because they were required to share their unique perspectives via their assigned roles (third subquestion). Once within-case data analysis was completed, the researcher engaged in cross-case data analysis.

As this study was a multiple case study, cross-case analysis was necessary. Cross-case analysis necessitates that each case be treated as a separate study (Yin, 2014).

Hence, the researcher engaged in the data analysis spiral for each case in this study. The researcher followed Yin’s (2014) suggestion of creating a table to display the data from each case in a uniform manner to readily identify similarities and differences between the

cases. This table (Table 4.4) is presented in Chapter Four. Propositional generalizations were developed based upon the researcher's analyses and interpretations (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) defined propositional generalizations as explicated, meaning that they evolved through analyzing the collected data. With the goal of supporting the themes and propositional generalizations that emerged from qualitative data analysis, the researcher likewise analyzed the quantitative data collected as part of this embedded multiple case study.

Quantitative Data

The researcher elected to design an embedded multiple case study to make this study more robust through the collection of quantitative data within a traditional qualitative design. The quantitative data collected in this study were the pre-test and post-test scores of each case on the Reader Self-Perception Scale. To both organize and analyze the data collected from the Reader Self-Perception Scale, the researcher used the IBM SPSS Statistics software. The researcher ran a dependent (paired) samples t-test to analyze the data as suggested by Kirk (2008) because the same participants were tested twice using the RSPS. A dependent (paired) samples t-test is used to determine if there is a statistically significant difference between the two means (Lund Research, Ltd., 2013). In the context of this study, the dependent (paired) samples t-test indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the cases' pre- and post-test scores on the RSPS. A statistically significant difference suggests that participation in literature circles influenced the self-efficacy of the reluctant and/or struggling readers, or cases, in this study. The results of the dependent (paired) samples t-test thereby strengthened this study because they correlated with the themes and propositional generalizations that emerged

from the researchers' qualitative data analysis. The researcher elaborates upon these results and findings in Chapter Four.

Again, the quantitative data collected in this study complement the qualitative data that was collected in this embedded multiple case study. To further clarify the necessity of each form of data to be collected, the researcher created Table 3.1, found on the next page. Following Table 3.1, the researcher speaks of the collection of multiple forms of data to make this study more robust and simultaneously enhance the validity of this study.

Research Validity

The term validity is often associated with quantitative research; however, validity also has a place within qualitative research. There are several steps that a qualitative researcher can take to increase the validation of his or her research findings. The researcher utilized several strategies to enhance the validity of this study. First, the researcher built rapport with the study participants as well as consistently observed them (Creswell, 2013). As previously mentioned, the researcher also triangulated the data by corroborating evidence from several sources (Creswell, 2013). The researcher enlisted the input of two peer reviewers (i.e. doctoral students with a literacy cognate) to provide an external check of the research (Creswell, 2013). Finally, in reporting the findings from this study the researcher provided rich, thick description in order to enhance transferability (Merriam, 1998). The researcher followed several recommendations for ensuring validity specific to case study research as well.

The researcher took several steps for maintaining the validity of this case study. The use of multiple sources of data helped to maintain construct validity (Yin, 2014),

Table 3.1.

Research questions

Research question	Question	Data collected
Central research question	How do literature circles influence the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers?	Reader Self-Perception Scale (pre- and post-test) Individual interviews (each case and classroom teacher) Direct observation Documentation Focus group session
First subquestion	How do reluctant and/or struggling readers describe themselves as readers after participating in literature circles and upon what do they base these descriptions?	Reader Self-Perception Scale (post-test score) Individual interviews (case) Focus group session
Second subquestion	What, if any, characteristics of participating in literature circles do reluctant and/or struggling readers perceive as beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable?	Individual interviews (case) Direct observations Focus group session
Third subquestion	Do reluctant and/or struggling readers perceive themselves as having their voices heard during literature circle participation, and why do they say so?	Individual interviews (case) Direct observation Focus group session

which means that a test assesses the theoretical construct it is intended to measure. During the analysis of qualitative data, the researcher engaged in pattern matching. Pattern matching is a strategy for maintaining internal validity (Yin, 2014). Though the researcher took measures to ensure this study's validity, it was not without its limitations.

Limitations

As outlined in Chapter One, there were a few limitations to this study, which will be readdressed. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, it is not generalizable because of the utilization of criterion-based purposive sampling and relatively small sample size. As previously mentioned, a colleague of the researcher taught at the school at which data was collected, and the sample was one of convenience for the researcher. Additionally, Yin (2014) identified reflexivity as a limitation of relying upon interviews and/or focus group sessions in case study research. Yin (2014) described reflexivity: "The conversation can lead to a mutual and subtle influence between you (the researcher) and the interviewee" (p. 112). Thus, the researcher may have unconsciously influenced the study participants in the individual interviews and/or focus group session; however, the interview and focus group session protocols were specifically designed to limit reflexivity. Despite these limitations, the meticulous planning of the research design, data collection, and data analysis enhanced the robustness of this study.

Conclusion

This chapter set forth the methodology that was used to execute this research study. The researcher elected to conduct an embedded multiple case study. The methodology was selected as the researcher identified it as best suited for answering the

central research question: How do literature circles influence the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers? This study was conducted in an intermediate-grades classroom in a central Texas school. The sample consisted of reluctant and/or struggling readers as identified by their Reader Self-Perception Scale pre-test scores and confirmed by their classroom teacher, Mrs. Ian. The researcher collected qualitative data in the form of interviews, direct observations, documentation, and a focus group session. In keeping with the embedded design of this study, the researcher collected quantitative data from the Reader Self-Perception Score to enhance findings that emerged from the qualitative data. The results and findings from this study are discussed in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results and Findings

As argued in Chapter One, teachers face insurmountable pressure to focus their efforts on preparing their students for high-stakes standardized tests by which not only are their students' academic achievements measured but also the teachers' abilities. The current era of high-stakes accountability does little to instill a love for reading in students, much less in those who are reluctant and/or struggling readers. Springer, Harris, and Dole (2017) encapsulated this issue by writing, "Too often, conversations about engagement, motivation, and interest focus on the either/or conundrum—either we can focus on readers' motivation and interest, or we can focus on test prep and learning" (p. 1). Presenting opportunities for readers to engage in classroom discussion has been found to enhance students' motivation to read, according to Guthrie and Alvermann (1999). Yet students with little affinity for and/or prior negative experiences with reading may be reluctant to engage in discussion. As Beers (1996) wrote,

Because reluctant readers do not recognize reading as a positive social experience, they have little motivation to move into a community of readers. To help reluctant readers move into a community of readers, we must first convince them that their reactions to a text are important and that in sharing their responses and listening to others they will enlighten others and learn from others (p. 22).

Therefore, the researcher argues that participating in literature circles—a student-led, discussion-based cooperative learning group—presents an opportunity to foster enjoyment of and subsequently motivation to read, especially for readers who are reluctant and/or struggling. This notion compelled the researcher to design this study.

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the influence of literature circle participation on the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers. The researcher designed this study under the hypothesis that reading within a social context and engaging in conversations about the text would prove beneficial for the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers and subsequently allow such readers to feel as though their voices were heard. The researcher postulated that being heard, in turn, would subsequently encourage reading as students' voices were valued within the context of literature-based discussions. This study was designed to answer four research questions, reiterated below.

Research Questions

Through this study, the researcher sought to answer several questions pertinent to the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers. The research questions were as follows:

1. How do literature circles influence the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers? (central research question)
2. How do reluctant and/or struggling readers describe themselves as readers after participating in literature circles and upon what do they base these descriptions? (first subquestion)
3. What, if any, characteristics of participating in literature circles do reluctant and/or struggling readers perceive as beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable? (second subquestion)

4. Do reluctant and/or struggling readers perceive themselves as having their voices heard during literature circle participation, and why do they say so? (third subquestion)

The researcher designed an embedded multiple case study to best answer these questions, and the methodology of this study is reiterated below.

Methodology

Prior to delving into the results and findings of this study, it is important to revisit its methodology. The site of this study was a Montessori magnet school serving pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade students within a central Texas public school district. Data collection occurred in the classroom of Mrs. Ian (pseudonym), who taught English language arts and reading as well as social studies to 19 intermediate-grades (i.e. fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade) students. In September 2016, the researcher conducted a whole-class administration of the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) developed by Henk & Melnick (1995). The RSPS was designed to measure the reader self-efficacy of intermediate-grades students (Henk & Melnick, 1995). After scoring each student's responses, the researcher employed criterion-based purposeful sampling to identify potential cases for participation in this study. The researcher ranked the scores of each student from highest to lowest and identified the eight students with the lowest scores as potential participants in this study. Parental consent and minor assent forms were collected for seven of the eight potential participants, and data was collected on these seven participants, who are further described later in this chapter.

In October 2016, the researcher conducted individual interviews with each of the seven participants prior to observing their participation in literature circles. The

researcher observed the participants as they met in literature circles over the course of eight weeks (excluding Thanksgiving and Christmas breaks) from November 2016 to January 2017. During the eight weeks in which the study participants and their peers (non-participants) met together in literature circles, the researcher took observation notes as well as collected documentation via the role sheet that each participant prepared.

In February 2017, the researcher again administered the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) to the entire class so as not to single out any of the study participants. After scoring the participants' RSPS post-tests, the researcher subsequently conducted individual interviews with each study participant, a focus group interview with the participants (except for Tomás), and interviewed Mrs. Ian.

Analysis of the collected data ensued in March 2017. The research design of an embedded multiple case study necessitated both within-case analysis and cross-case analysis. The results and findings of this study are presented in this chapter after the researcher relays pertinent information and provides a vignette of each study participant.

Pertinent Information

To fully comprehend the results and findings of this study, it is important for the reader to first understand some pertinent information. Typically, literature circles entail dividing a whole class of students into small groups centered upon their mutual selection of a text. For example, one literature circle may form around each member's preference for *Charlotte's Web* by E.B. White whereas another literature circle forms around reading *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell, etc. The literature circles in this study, however, were atypical because Mrs. Ian exerted quite a bit of control over them. For example, Mrs. Ian changed the group dynamics of the literature circles each week. Mrs.

Ian could do so because unlike in typical literature circles, in which students choose to read different texts, the entire class voted to read the same text, *Rules* by Cynthia Lord. All 19 students electing to read *Rules* enabled Mrs. Ian to change the membership of each literature circle from week-to-week as opposed to maintaining consistent group membership throughout the observed eight-week literature circle cycle. Thus, a major implication—that of the influence that the group dynamics of literature circles had on participants—emerged during data analysis and is discussed further in Chapter Five. In addition to changing the grouping of literature circles, Mrs. Ian did not allow the Discussion Directors to write their own questions for discussion. Instead, Mrs. Ian required them to select predetermined, largely generic questions. More details on these questions are given in Chapter Five.

Next, the roles that the students played in their literature circles are revisited below. Mrs. Ian selected these roles and assigned them to each student accordingly. The Discussion Director was the informal leader of his or her literature circle. The Discussion Director was tasked with choosing questions (from Mrs. Ian's *question box*) to pose to the group for discussion. The Literacy Luminary was tasked with finding interesting and/or seminal passages from the text selection. The Word Wizard was charged with defining interesting, new, and/or puzzling words found within the context of the book. The Connector was charged with explicitly connecting the text selection to other texts and/or prior knowledge and experiences. Expectedly, the Summarizer was tasked with providing a summary of the text selection to his or her group. Lastly, it was the duty of the Artful Artist to illustrate a scene from the text that encapsulated the selection or chapter and was of interest to him or her.

Finally, the length and detail in which the participants expressed themselves to the researcher varied. Will was the most reluctant to verbalize his answers during the pre- and post- individual interviews, yet Will was one of the more vocal participants during the focus group. Tomás, who was isolated at times from his peers due to his misbehavior, was not allowed to attend the focus group session although he was present in Mrs. Ian’s class at the time. A more detailed description of each study participant is presented in the form of a vignette below.

Participant Vignettes

As the design of this study was an embedded multiple case study, it is essential for the reader to be familiar with each of the cases who participated in this study, especially as within-case analysis comprises the bulk of the results and findings discussed in this chapter. Seven students in one intermediate-grades classroom participated in this study. Table 4.1 encapsulates the demographics of the study participants who are further described in the following vignettes.

Table 4.1.

Demographics of study participants.

Participant	Race/ethnicity	Grade	Reluctant	Struggling
Grace	Black	5 th	X	
Humberto	Latino	5 th	X	
Lucita	Latina	4 th		X
Naomi	Black	5 th	X	
Tomás	Latino	6 th	X	X
Will	White	6 th	X	X
Ximena	Latina	4 th		X

Grace

Grace was a ten-year-old Black female in the fifth grade and attended the school at which data was collected for five years. In our initial interview, Grace stated that math was her favorite subject in school because she “get(s) to work out the problems a lot, and it’s kind of easy.” In her free time, Grace enjoyed playing games outdoors with her sisters. Mrs. Ian described Grace as her “little teacher” because “she wants to be in charge.” The researcher’s initial observations of Grace participating in literature circles aligned with Mrs. Ian’s description of her. In these initial observations, Grace was a dominant presence in her literature circle even when she was not in the leading role of Discussion Director. Yet as she continued to engage in literature circles, Grace learned to relinquish control and became more of a facilitator to her peers as opposed to a forceful leader.

When asked if she liked to read in our initial interview, Grace responded, “Sometimes. It just depends on if the book is interesting.” Mrs. Ian was surprised that Grace’s score on the initial Reader Self-Perception Scale indicated that her reader self-efficacy was low. However, upon further reflection, Mrs. Ian agreed with the score by stating that Grace was more extrinsically motivated to read out of a desire to please Mrs. Ian as opposed to being intrinsically motivated.

Humberto

Humberto was a Latino male in the fifth grade. In our first interview, Humberto stated that science was his favorite subject in school because “you get to do like experiments.” In his free time, Humberto enjoyed drawing pictures, watching videos, and “creating stuff with materials.” Humberto appeared to the researcher to have been one of

the least popular students in Mrs. Ian's class. The researcher observed Humberto often working in isolation, even during times when Mrs. Ian permitted the students to work as a group. The researcher observed cases in this study as well as non-participants often make rude comments to and/or about Humberto as well. Another participant, Will, confirmed the researcher's suspicions regarding Humberto's popularity by repeatedly implying during the focus group that he tries to avoid being in a group with Humberto.

In the initial interview, Humberto responded that he "sometimes" liked to read and added that reading "sometimes takes time like away from fun things." Mrs. Ian described Humberto as a reluctant reader. Regarding Humberto's affinity for reading, Mrs. Ian remarked, "He just kind of seems like, 'Okay, well, I'll do it.' But he didn't seem excited about [reading]."

Lucita

Lucita was a Latina female in the fourth grade. Lucita stated that math was her favorite subject in school because "it's challenging." In her free time, Lucita enjoyed playing soccer so much so that in our second interview she remarked, "Soccer's my life." As a fourth-grader, Lucita was often overshadowed by her older (i.e. fifth- and sixth-grade peers) while participating in literature circles.

When asked during the initial interview if she liked to read, Lucita answered, "No. Not a lot." Mrs. Ian classified Lucita as a struggling reader, adding, "[Lucita] masked [struggling with reading] very well, very well. She would smile and say she has it when she doesn't."

Naomi

Naomi was a Black female in the fifth grade. Math was Naomi's favorite subject in school. Naomi stated, "[Math] can be frustrating, but it's sometimes fun so it makes me happy to like do it." Naomi enjoyed taking walks in her free time and liked animals. Of the seven participants, Naomi was the most resistant to literature circle participation. When Naomi's friends were in the same literature circle as her, she became easily distracted and engaged in off-task behaviors. Yet when Naomi was in a literature circle with peers whom she found socially undesirable, she resisted participating as well.

In our initial interview, the researcher asked Naomi if she liked to read. Naomi responded, "Not really," and when asked to explain further Naomi stated, "'Cause I don't know; it's just I don't like to read." To describe Naomi, Mrs. Ian stated, "Naomi is a strong reader, just does not always want to read...She's one of those students that I look at and she's highly capable, she's just very reluctant." This comment, therefore, suggested that Mrs. Ian classified Naomi as a reluctant reader.

Tomás

Tomás was a Latino male in the sixth grade. Science was Tomás' favorite subject in school because he liked "doing chemistry and stuff like that." When he was not at school, Tomás enjoyed being outside as he liked to play football and soccer. When not outside, Tomás liked to watch television and play video games. Tomás was typecast as a troublemaker in Mrs. Ian's class and was isolated at times from his peers as a consequence for misbehavior. Tomás hinted at this in our initial interview as he described literature circles by saying, "It's when like everybody's in a group and have a book that you read and have jobs and you do your job, and *if you don't do a good job then you do*

all of the jobs by yourself...” [emphasis added by the researcher]. The preceding quote from Tomás struck the researcher as he was the only participant that described literature circles in this manner. While the other six participants were present at all of eight of their literature circle meetings, Tomás participated in only four literature circle meetings. The researcher was unsure as to why Tomás did not participate in four literature circle meetings but postulates that he was not allowed to participate by Mrs. Ian for the following plausible reasons: (a) lack of preparation due to not completing his role sheet and/or reading the text, (b) engaged in completing other assignments for Mrs. Ian or another teacher, or (c) due to misbehavior.

During the initial interview, Tomás remarked that he liked to read because “it’s better for you...at school.” As a reader, Mrs. Ian described Tomás as both reluctant and struggling. Mrs. Ian added, “I think [Tomás’] behaviors were getting in the way because he was basically doing anything he could to avoid participating in anything dealing with reading.”

Will

Will was a White male in the sixth grade. Will’s favorite subject in school was science because he liked “the chemical reactions.” Will enjoyed playing baseball and soccer. Will was the most difficult participant to interview because he was hesitant to vocalize his answers; ironically, Will was one of the most vocal participants during the focus group. Based on the researcher’s observations of and interactions with Will, the researcher concluded that Will seemed to want to exude a nonchalant persona in front of his peers. In describing Will, Mrs. Ian stated, “He’s one of my enigmas.”

When asked during the first interview if he liked to read, Will responded, “Kind of.” The researcher pressed Will to elaborate to which he responded, “Sometimes I don’t want to read. Sometimes I kind of don’t.” In describing Will, Mrs. Ian classified him as both a reluctant and struggling reader. Mrs. Ian described further, “I think when he is presented with more challenging reading then he draws back...he is reading on grade level according to every reading inventory I have, but...I figured out it's not 'I can't,' it's 'I don't want to.’”

Ximena

Ximena was a Latina female in the fourth grade. Ximena chose both math and reading as her favorite subjects in school. In math, Ximena enjoyed working out two-digit multiplication problems whereas in reading, she liked “character traits.” Of the seven participants, Ximena was the most shy. Similar to Lucita, Ximena was one of the youngest students in Mrs. Ian’s class. Like Lucita, Ximena’s participation in the literature circle meetings was, at least initially, limited by her older (i.e. fifth- and sixth-grade) peers.

In the initial interview, Ximena expressed that she enjoyed reading. Furthermore, Ximena stated, “I just like to find out what kind of stories are there and...I just like to read.” To describe Ximena, Mrs. Ian stated, “Ximena was—she’s a new fourth-grader—and so I saw her as more of a struggling reader.”

Through the collection of data as briefly outlined earlier in this chapter, the researcher sought to answer four research questions. Being an embedded multiple case study, the researcher first presents the results of within-case analysis for each study participant prior to delving into cross-case analysis. The results and findings from within-

case analysis for each research question are described beneath a corresponding subheading based on the research questions.

Reader Self-Efficacy prior to and following Literature Circle Participation

The results and findings from the central research question that guided this study are now presented. The central research question asked: How do literature circles influence the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers? In seeking to answer this question, the researcher collected both quantitative and qualitative data. In Chapter Three, the researcher predicted that literature circle participation would have a positive influence on the participants and improve their reader self-efficacy. The results of the quantitative data analysis are discussed first.

As previously mentioned, the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) was developed by Henk & Melnick (1995) to measure the reader self-efficacy of intermediate-grades students. The Reader Self-Perception Scale is divided into four scales: (1) Progress, (2) Observational Comparison, (3) Social Feedback, and (4) Physiological States (Henk & Melnick, 1995). The child's perceived growth as a reader over time is measured through the Progress Scale whereas the child's perception of his or her reading performance as compared to his or her peers is encapsulated by the Observational Comparison scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995). The child's perception of how his or her peers, family, and teacher view him or her as a reader is measured by the Social Feedback scale, and the physical state of being experienced by the child while reading is encapsulated by the Physiological States scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995). The Reader Self-Perception Scale also includes the statement "I think I am a good reader" as a measure of general reader self-efficacy that is unattached to one of the four aforementioned scales.

The researcher administered the RSPS as a pre-test to all students in Mrs. Ian’s class in September 2016. In February 2017, the researcher again conducted a whole-class administration of the RSPS as a post-test. For the purpose of this study, only the RSPS pre- and post-test scores of study participants were analyzed.

A dependent-samples t-test was conducted to compare the reader self-efficacy of participants prior to participating in literature circles and the reader self-efficacy of participants after participating in literature circles. These results are depicted in Table 4.2 below.

Table 4.2.

Results of t-test and Descriptive Statistics for Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) pre- and post-test

Outcome	Pre-test		Post-test		n	95% CI for Mean Difference	d	t
	M	SD	M	SD				
	2.99	0.50	3.69	0.45	7	-1.14, 0.24	1.41	-3.76

* $p < .05$.

There was a significant difference between the participants’ RSPS pre-test scores ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.50$) and the participants’ RSPS post-test scores ($M = 3.69$, $SD = 0.45$); $t(6) = -3.76$, $p = .009$; $d = 1.41$. The effect size for this analysis ($d = 1.41$) was found to exceed Cohen’s (1988) convention for a large effect ($d = 0.80$). Results from the dependent (paired) samples t-test suggest that literature circle participation positively influenced the self-reported reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers. Table 4.3 below synthesizes the mean pre- and post-test scores on the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) for each case.

Within-case analysis of the collected qualitative data also suggested that the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers was positively influenced by literature circle participation. In Chapter Three, the researcher predicted this pattern, which was met for each of the seven participants. Qualitative data also supports this assertion as described in greater detail for each case in the next section.

Table 4.3.

Participants' Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) pre- and post-test means

Case	RSPS Pre-test (M)	RSPS Post-test (M)
Grace	3.69	4.06
Humberto	3.03	3.21
Lucita	2.43	3.72
Naomi	3.33	4.03
Tomás	2.53	3.96
Will	2.54	2.90
Ximena	3.43	3.93

Grace

Grace's pre-test score (M = 3.69) on the Reader Self-Perception Scale increased by 0.37 points as indicated by her post-test score (M = 4.06). On the RSPS post-test, Grace demonstrated improvement on three scales: (1) Progress, (2) Social Feedback, and (3) Physiological states. Her score on the observational comparison scale remained the same. In responding to the statement "I think I am a good reader," Grace circled "agree" on the pre-test and "strongly agree" on the post-test. Grace attributed differences between her RSPS pre-test and post-test scores to "the literature circle books...because I actually read it and I enjoyed it and I wrote down—I wrote about [it] too so yeah." Quantitative support from her Reader Self-Perception Scale scores and qualitative support from the

interviews indicate that Grace's reader self-efficacy was positively influenced by her literature circle participation.

Humberto

Humberto's pre-test score ($M = 3.03$) increased by 0.18 points on the RSPS post-test ($M = 3.21$). The RSPS post-test indicated improvement on the Progress and Social Feedback scales. Humberto's scores on the Observational Comparison and Physiological States scales declined between the pre- and post-tests. On the pre-test, Humberto selected "agree" in response to the "I think I am a good reader" statement yet he circled "undecided" on the post-test. When asked about differences between the pre- and post-test scores, Humberto expressed that reading is "kind of hard" but that he liked participating in literature circles. Both the quantitative and qualitative data collected on Humberto suggest that his reader self-efficacy was positively influenced by literature circle participation. Of the seven cases in this study, however, Humberto's score between the RSPS pre-test and RSPS post-test improved the least.

Lucita

Lucita's Reader Self-Perception Scale pre-test score ($M = 2.43$) increased by 1.29 points on the post-test ($M = 3.72$). On the post-test, Lucita demonstrated improvement on each of the four scales: (1) Progress, (2) Observational Comparison, (3) Social Feedback, and (4) Physiological States. Her general self-efficacy score remained the same. On both the pre- and post-tests, Lucita circled 'undecided' in responding to the statement 'I think I am a good reader.' Lucita attributed differences between her RSPS pre- and post-tests to her father. She explained, "[M]y dad said if we don't concentrate on reading, math, and

social studies, and all the subjects that my soccer career could be over until I can get it up.” The quantitative data suggests that Lucita’s reader self-efficacy was positively influenced by her participation in literature circles. Qualitative evidence suggests the same although Lucita attributed her improved self-efficacy to her father’s threatening to end her soccer career if her grades did not improve.

Naomi

Naomi's score on the Reader Self-Perception Scale pre-test ($M = 3.33$) increased by 0.70 points on the post-test ($M = 4.03$). Naomi’s RSPS post-test score illustrated improvement on all four scales: (1) Progress, (2) Observational Comparison, (3) Social Feedback, and (4) Physiological States. On both the pre- and post-test, Naomi circled ‘agree’ as her response to ‘I think I am a good reader.’ Naomi attributed differences between her RSPS pre- and post-test scores to “reading like longer books instead of reading like shorter books.” Both quantitative and qualitative data suggest that the reader self-efficacy of Naomi was positively influenced by her participation in literature circles.

Tomás

Tomás’ Reader Self-Perception Scale pre-test score ($M = 2.53$) increased by 1.43 points to the post-test ($M = 3.96$). From the pre- to post-test, Tomás improved on each scale: (1) Progress, (2) Observational Comparison, (3) Social Feedback, and (4) Physiological States. Similarly, in responding to the ‘I think I am a good reader’ statement, Tomás initially circled ‘disagree’ but changed his response to ‘agree’ on the RSPS post-test. Of the seven participants, Tomás’ score increased the most from the RSPS pre-test to post-test. When questioned about the difference between his pre- and

post-test scores, Tomás offered, “Because last time I took it, I was struggling with words more than when I took it again. I was kind of not getting stuck.” The quantitative and qualitative data suggest that Tomás’ self-efficacy was positively influence by literature circle participation.

Will

Will's score on the Reader Self-Perception Scale increased by 0.36 points from the pre-test ($M = 2.54$) to the post-test ($M = 2.90$). Will’s score improved on three scales: (1) Progress, (2) Observational Comparison, and (3) Social Feedback between the RSPS pre- and post-tests. In responding to the statement ‘I think I am a good reader,’ Will’s response remained ‘undecided.’ Between the pre- and post-test scores, however, Will’s score on the Physiological States scale decreased. Will’s reader self-efficacy was positively influenced by his participation in literature circles as supported by both quantitative and qualitative data.

Ximena

Ximena's score on the Reader Self-Perception Scale pre-test ($M = 3.43$) increased by 0.50 points to the post-test ($M = 3.93$). Ximena’s scores on the following scales increased from the pre- and post-tests: (1) Progress, (2) Observational Comparison, and (3) Social Feedback. However, Ximena’s score on the physiological states scale decreased. Ximena initially marked ‘undecided’ in responding to the statement ‘I think I am a good reader’ on the pre-test but changed her response to ‘agree’ on the RSPS post-test. When asked about differences between her RSPS pre- and post-test scores, Ximena offered the following explanation for her improvement: “Because in September I wasn't a

very good reader and then I started reading and then I got better at the words.” Ximena did not expressly attribute the difference between her pre- and post-test scores on the RSPS to her participation in literature circles; however, as described in the section below, Ximena verbalized her opinion that literature circle participation helped her to become a better reader. Thus, based on quantitative and qualitative support, literature circle participation positively influenced the reader self-efficacy of Ximena.

As the design of this study was an embedded multiple case study design, the researcher collected primarily qualitative data—analysis of which lends itself to answering the remaining three research questions.

Self-description following Literature Circle Participation

Results and findings for the first subquestion are presented below. The first subquestion posed by the researcher asked: How do reluctant and/or struggling readers describe themselves as readers after participating in literature circles and upon what do they base these descriptions? In Chapter Three, the researcher predicted that the participants would describe themselves as more motivated to read and/or state that they find reading more enjoyable following their participation in literature circles. The predicted pattern was met for each case and is detailed as follows.

Grace

Prior to participating in literature circles, Grace stated that she liked to read if the text was interesting. To describe herself as a reader Grace remarked, “I’m a good reader depending on what time of day it is.” Grace remarked that she reads best in the afternoon because she’s neither too sleepy (as in the morning) nor too grumpy (as at night). During

our initial interview, Grace also expressed her disdain for reading aloud because she did not like the sound of her voice.

Following her participation in literature circles, Grace was again asked if she liked to read, to which she responded, “Yes...because I found interesting books that I like.” Grace added that she liked fantasy books. Her enjoyment of reading seemingly improved between the pre- and post-interviews. As in the pre-interview, Grace described herself as a “good reader.” Unlike in the pre-interview, Grace did not attribute her reading ability to a particular time of day but instead provided concrete examples to support her self-description. Grace offered the following examples, “Because I can actually find words, and I know what the words mean.” Grace commented that she helped her fellow literature circle members to not only understand her perspective but also the text. After being asked if literature circles helped her to identify any strengths and/or weaknesses as a reader, Grace remarked that one of her strengths was being able to “pronounce more words and say more words and understand them...because, like, the people in my group kind of helped me understand the words too.” Grace did not provide any examples of a weakness that literature circle participation helped her to identify but instead stated that she used to be afraid to read aloud in front of others but was no longer. In responding to a question as to whether participating in a literature circle changed her as a reader Grace remarked, “Well, it changed me to read more and like the books I read.”

Grace’s answers to several statements on the Reader Self-Perception Scale improved between the pre- and post-tests. On the pre-test, Grace answered ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘I like to read aloud’ and changed it to ‘agree’ on the post-tests. In

responding to the following two statements, 'I feel good inside when I read' and 'I enjoy reading,' Grace initially answered 'undecided' but change her answers to 'agree' on the post-test.

As previously mentioned, Mrs. Ian expressed her surprise that Grace's RSPS pre-test score indicated that she had one of the lower reader self-efficacies in her classroom. However, Mrs. Ian proposed that Grace was only extrinsically motivated to read to please her teacher. Mrs. Ian explains further,

[Grace] wants to please. She wants to be a teacher, and she is one of those students that when she knows that I want her to do something, she will do it but that's very different. That's an extrinsic motivation, that's not intrinsic for her. And so I think now she's less motivated by what someone else wants, like less motivated by what I want her to do and more motivated by what she wants to do.

Like Grace, the predicted pattern was met in the case of Humberto as described below.

Humberto

In our initial interview, Humberto stated that he occasionally liked to read. Humberto disliked reading at times when it detracted from other activities that he considered to be more fun. According to Humberto, he enjoyed reading when "I do it in groups or when I'm like reading to somebody." Humberto described himself as a "creative and imaginative" reader. Reading helped Humberto to visualize and imagine things as well as led him to create things. However, Humberto admitted that at times he struggled with reading, "[S]ometimes it's hard to think about the reading, and I sometimes don't know words that are being used. And it's really hard to understand what a question means." Finally, Humberto remarked that he liked to contemplate the character's dialogue in the text.

In the post-interview, Humberto expressed that he enjoyed reading “a little bit” because reading spurred his imagination and made him think but added that “some books are really long to read.” Humberto again described himself as an imaginative reader in the post-interview. The researcher asked Humberto if participating in literature circles helped him to identify any strengths or weaknesses as a reader. Humberto replied, “defining words” as a strength and did not offer any weaknesses. The researcher asked Humberto if literature circle participation changed him as a reader to which he responded, “No ‘cause like I don’t think reading is good enough for me to do.” Humberto added that he would rather “do something else instead of reading.”

Between the RSPS pre- and post-tests, Humberto changed his responses to two statements. Initially, Humberto marked ‘agree’ in response to the statement ‘I feel calm when I read’ but changed it to ‘strongly agree’ on the post-test. Humberto’s response to the statement ‘I feel comfortable when I read’ improved from ‘undecided’ on the pre-test to ‘agree’ on the post-test. These two statements are particularly noteworthy as they relate to Humberto’s enjoyment of reading.

Mrs. Ian did not feel as though Humberto changed as a reader after participating in literature circles. Even so, the researcher argues that there were some positive changes of note in Humberto’s enjoyment of reading and his recognition of one of his strengths as a reader (i.e. defining words). However, Humberto’s motivation to read remained seemingly unimproved.

Lucita

In the initial interview, Lucita expressed that she did not like to read. Lucita added that reading could be fun at times when it offered an adventure but could also be

challenging, especially when the text contained longer words. Reading was not a relaxing activity to Lucita although she attributed this to the noise level of the surrounding environment. As a reader, Lucita described herself as “smart;” however, she did not provide any examples to support her self-description.

In our interview following her participation in literature circles, the researcher again asked Lucita if she liked to read. Lucita responded, “Well, since last time I kind of am starting to get used to it and liking it.” Lucita attributed her increased enjoyment of reading to improvement in her ability to concentrate on the words and visualize the text. Lucita described herself as “not that smart but smart...because I’m starting to learn bigger words as I go.” Lucita stated that literature circle participation is “helping me understand the reading.” In terms of identifying any weaknesses, Lucita felt as though participating in literature circles helped her to realize that could she be shy when it came to new things. Lucita ended our post-interview by sharing, “Well, that I improved. Smart. I’m getting smarter—growing more.”

Lucita’s answers to several statements related to enjoyment of reading improved from the RSPS pre-test to the post-test. For example, Lucita initially marked ‘undecided’ for the following two statements: ‘Reading makes me feel happy inside’ and ‘I feel calm when I read.’ On the RSPS post-test, Lucita marked ‘agree’ for these statements. Similarly, Lucita changed her answers from ‘disagree’ to ‘agree’ for the following three statements: ‘I feel comfortable when I read,’ ‘Reading makes me feel good,’ and ‘I enjoy reading.’

Mrs. Ian remarked that participating in literature circles benefitted Lucita as a reader. Mrs. Ian explained, “[Literature circles] gave her an avenue to begin practicing

skills she's learning, and I think for her, it helped cement some of that understanding...I think it's been helping her improve. I think it's been helping her a lot." Qualitative data suggests that Lucita found reading more enjoyable following her participation in literature circles.

Naomi

Prior to participating in literature circles, Naomi expressed that she did not enjoy reading. For Naomi to enjoy reading, a book had to be interesting; Naomi added that books about animals were of interest to her. Naomi stated that when she reads, it is "cause Mrs. Ian tells me to." Naomi described herself as a good reader but admitted that she did not like to read aloud because she felt uncomfortable when doing so.

In our post-interview, Naomi stated that she liked to read "sometimes." She reiterated that she enjoyed reading about animals but that reading could get boring at times. Naomi described herself as "an intelligent reader." When asked for her reasoning behind her self-description, Naomi stated, "Cause I can say words that most kids can't, and I can like read better—like if the word is really long, I could probably figure it out." In responding to a question about whether literature circle participation helped her to identify any of her strengths or weaknesses as a reader, Naomi did not offer any weaknesses and stated "I'm very honest" as her strength.

Naomi's RSPS post-test denoted some improvement in her responses to statements concerning her enjoyment of reading. On the pre-test, Naomi circled 'undecided' for the statements 'I think reading is relaxing' and 'Reading makes me feel good;' Naomi changed her responses to 'agree' for both statements. Naomi initially

responded ‘disagree’ to the statement ‘I like to read aloud’ but changed her response to ‘strongly agree’ on the RSPS post-test.

Mrs. Ian commented that participating in literature circles helped Naomi to realize that there are a variety of texts that can be read and likewise a variety of activities that comprise reading. Mrs. Ian, however, did not report any changes in Naomi as a reader following her participation in literature circles. Both quantitative and qualitative data suggest that Naomi’s enjoyment of reading seemingly improved as well as her reader self-description.

Tomás

In our initial interview, Tomás expressed that he liked to read, adding that it’s better for him academically. Tomás described himself as an “okay reader” because he struggled with some words and needed at help at times. Tomás expressed that he felt comfortable while reading alone but did not like to read aloud because he did not want to be embarrassed in front of others in case he made a mistake.

In the post-interview, Tomás reiterated that he enjoyed reading; however, he did not give an extrinsic factor for reading but instead an intrinsic factor. Tomás specified, “I think reading’s fun and interesting.” Tomás’ description of himself also improved from the pre- to post-interview. When asked to offer a description of himself as a reader in our post-interview, Tomás offered, “Good. I struggle sometimes with words.” Tomás did not feel that literature circle participation helped him to identify any strengths or weaknesses as a reader. Yet Tomás felt that participating in literature circles changed him “a little bit.” Tomás added, “Some words I didn’t understand but I got—I took the book home and

I read it overnight and I brought it back to school and so for our literature circle, I know what the words mean.”

Tomás’ responses to several statements on the Reader Self-Perception Scale related to enjoyment of reading improved from the pre- to the post-test. On the RSPS pre-test, Tomás circled ‘undecided’ and changed his response to ‘agree’ for the statements ‘I feel good inside when I read’ and ‘Reading makes me feel happy inside.’ Tomás answered ‘undecided’ on the pre-test and ‘strongly agree’ on the post-test to the statement ‘I feel calm when I read.’ Tomás’ answers improved from ‘agree’ on the pre-test to ‘strongly agree’ on the post-test for the following three statements: ‘I feel comfortable when I read,’ ‘Reading makes me feel good,’ and ‘I enjoy reading.’ Finally, Tomás initially responded ‘disagree’ to the statement ‘I think reading is relaxing’ but changed his response to ‘strongly agree’ on the RSPS post-test.

Mrs. Ian noticed quite a bit of difference in Tomás. Mrs. Ian reported that Tomás began to ask to borrow books from her classroom library following his participation in literature circles. Mrs. Ian stated, “He wants to read, which is very different...from the fourth-grader I started off with or even the fifth-grader I had.” Mrs. Ian explained that in the previous two years, Tomás “would just kind of fall out in the middle of the floor and drag his feet and do everything he could to avoid [reading].” Additionally, Mrs. Ian stated that literature circle participation seemingly increased Tomás’ confidence as a reader. Quantitative and qualitative data suggest that Tomás’ motivation to and enjoyment of reading increased following his participation in literature circles.

Will

As previously mentioned, Will was hesitant to vocalize his answers during both the pre- and post-literature circle individual interviews. Initially, Will expressed that he occasionally enjoyed reading. Will did not elaborate, but verbally agreed with the researcher's suggestion that he liked to read when the text was of interest to him and did not enjoy reading when he considered the text to be boring. He further explained that when he does read, it is to learn. Will did not vocalize a description of himself as a reader.

In the post-interview, Will responded, "Yes and no" to a question of whether he enjoyed reading. Will added, "Yes because I like to read comics, and no because sometimes I don't like to read." Once again, Will did not vocalize his reader self-description. Will did not think that literature circle participation helped him to identify any strengths or weaknesses as a reader nor did it change him as a reader.

Will's responses to two statements on the Reader Self-Perception Scale related to reading enjoyment changed from the pre-test to the post-test. On the pre-test, Will responded 'strongly disagree' to these two statements: 'I feel good inside when I read' and 'Reading makes me feel happy inside.' On the post-tests, however, Will marked 'undecided' to both of these statements.

Mrs. Ian did note changes in Will as a reader after his participation in literature circles. Mrs. Ian remarked,

I think [literature circles] made a little bit of a difference because even though [Will] would kind of just say 'I still don't want to.' He still does it. And that I found interesting because before I wouldn't have even been able to get him to even want to and then do it. He would say, 'I don't want to' and then not. But now I saw where he was actually putting forth the effort to do it and so that made a huge difference for him.

The researcher's observations of Will as a literature circle participant aligned with those made by Mrs. Ian. During the first four of eight observations, Will verbalized his disdain for reading; however, in the latter half of the literature circle meetings, the researcher did not overhear him remark, "I hate reading." Although Will did not expressly vocalize an increase in his enjoyment of reading, both quantitative and qualitative evidence suggest that Will's enjoyment of reading seemingly increased following his participation in literature circles.

Ximena

Ximena stated that she liked to read in the initial interview and further remarked that she enjoyed finding out different stories. Ximena did not offer a description of herself as a reader but stated that reading could be hard for her at times. Ximena stated that reading can be challenging "[b]ecause sometimes I mess up the words and then sometimes I don't." Ximena expressed that she did not like to read aloud for fear that she would embarrass herself in front of her peers if she did not know a word that she encountered in the text.

In our post-interview, Ximena stated that she enjoyed reading because it helped her to feel calm. Ximena subsequently described herself as a "good" reader. Ximena stated that literature circle participation helped her to realize that she is good at reading but that she could improve in terms of her summarizing skills. When asked if participating in literature circles changed her as a reader, Ximena responded, "Mhmm... Because I wasn't a very good reader until I read and read every single day for our literature circle, and it made me a better reader." Ximena added that participating in literature circles helped her to "think of me as smart, a good reader."

Ximena's responses to a few statements on the Reader Self-Perception Scale that relate to enjoyment of reading improved from the pre- to post-test. Ximena initially responded 'strongly disagree' on the pre-test to the statement 'I like to read aloud' yet changed her response to 'undecided' on the post-test. Ximena was originally 'undecided' in responding to the statement 'I feel good inside when I read' yet changed her response to 'agree.' Finally, Ximena responded 'agree' to 'I enjoy reading' on the RSPS pre-test but marked 'strongly agree' on the post-test.

Mrs. Ian stated that Ximena made great improvements as a reader. Mrs. Ian added,

I think definitely literature circles has helped kind of add to that confidence level, and it gave [Ximena] a chance to participate independently and in a social setting. And to use what she's read and use what she's learning on a deeper level so I do think it helped.

Amid Ximena's improvements as a reader, Mrs. Ian stated that Ximena began to use evidence from the text to support her assertions. Ximena's motivation to and/or enjoyment of reading improved following her participation in literature circles.

Although each case met the predicted pattern of expressing more motivation to read and/or found reading more enjoyable following his or her participation in literature circles, the researcher's predicted pattern was not met for each case in terms of his or her description of positive characteristics of literature circles.

Beneficial, Motivating, and/or Enjoyable Characteristics of Literature Circles

Beneath this subheading, results and findings for the second subquestion are discussed. The second subquestion posed by the researcher asked: What, if any, characteristics of participating in literature circles do reluctant and/or struggling readers

perceive as beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable? In Chapter Three, the researcher predicted that each study participant would identify discussing a book of his or her choice with peers and the ability to share his or her unique perspective due to the elements of student choice, the cooperative nature of literature circles, and self-management as beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable. This predicted pattern was met for four of the seven cases (i.e. Grace, Humberto, Lucita, and Tomás) but was not met for the three remaining cases (i.e. Naomi, Will, and Ximena).

Grace

Grace described literature circles as “fun.” In our second interview, Grace characterized her experience in literature circles as positive, adding, “[W]e all got along with each other, and we didn’t fight...And we all read and we listened to each other read.” One aspect that Grace enjoyed about literature circle participation was writing down her thoughts about the text by preparing her role sheet for each meeting. During the focus group discussion, Grace noted that literature circles differed from typical reading instruction. Subsequently, Grace felt that literature circles made reading instruction “less boring.” In reflecting upon her participation in literature circles on the eighth role sheet, Grace wrote, “I also enjoy doing it like this because it gets stuff done. Also, it is easier; we know what to do.” According to Grace, although literature circles “take up time,” she enjoyed participating because she “didn’t have to do work a lot.” Grace explicitly referred to the cooperative nature of literature circles as one characteristic that she found enjoyable. Additionally, Grace seemingly appreciated the variety that literature circles offer from more conventional English language arts and reading instruction. Though she

acknowledged that preparing for and participating in literature circles took time, Grace seemingly did not consider literature circles to be work.

Humberto

As mentioned in the previous section, Humberto stated that he liked to read in groups. This suggests that the cooperative nature of literature circles was seemingly enjoyable for him. In reflecting upon literature circles, Humberto wrote on his final role sheet, “I enjoy the book in groups because it’s much easier to learn about the book.” Yet in the post-interview, Humberto described his experience in literature circles as neither positive nor negative. Humberto stated that each of the roles—apart from Word Wizard, which was coincidentally, his favorite—were difficult. However, Humberto also expressed his enjoyment of the variety of roles (e.g. Discussion Director, Word Wizard, Artful Artist, etc.) one could play over time through literature circles. During the focus group discussion, Humberto agreed with Grace’s assertion that literature circles made reading instruction less boring. He added, “We have more conversations,” which indicated his appreciation for the cooperative nature of literature circles. Much like Grace, Humberto relished that literature circles offered an alternative to more typical English language arts and reading instruction. Humberto appreciated the conversational and cooperative nature of literature circles.

Lucita

For Lucita, being in a literature circle was “sometimes fun.” Lucita characterized her experience in literature circles as positive by stating that it enabled her to “[get] to

know the people in my class better as I want.” Lucita’s comments suggest that she enjoyed the cooperative nature of literature circles.

Naomi

Naomi described literature circles as “a lot of reading.” Naomi categorized her experience in literature circles as positive by remarking, “[I]t wasn't as bad as I thought it was going to be. I thought it was going to be like very boring and stuff, but it wasn't that boring. But it was still pretty boring.” On her final role sheet Naomi wrote, “If I had another chance to do another lit meeting I would only [emphasis hers] if the book had pictures.” However, Naomi did not mention any beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable characteristics of literature circles that the researcher would classify under student choice, cooperative learning, or self-management.

Tomás

In the post-interview, Tomás characterized his experience in literature circles as positive, adding that he loved to read and “doing stuff that involves books.” When asked for his thoughts on being in a literature circle, Tomás responded, “It’s awesome...because we like take turns doing each job.” Tomás’ statement hints that Tomás appreciated the cooperative nature of literature circles.

Will

Will characterized his experience in literature circles as “boring” yet positive because “it wasn’t hard.” Will initially expressed that he liked being in a literature circle although he did not offer a reason as to why. Will stated that literature circles were different from the usual reading instruction that he receives because “we have to like do a

job instead of just reading.” In his written reflection of literature circles, Will characterized them as “sometimes boring and sometimes good and funny.” Will did not specify any beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable characteristics of literature circles that the researcher would classify under the categories of student choice, cooperative learning, or self-management.

Ximena

Ximena expressed that she liked participating in literature circles because “I get to read and I get to write what is funny and what’s the problem.” In our pre-interview, Ximena stated that she enjoyed writing; therefore, her enjoyment of writing in preparation for the literature circle meeting is unsurprising. Ximena characterized her participation in literature circles as neither positive nor negative. Ximena remarked, “It was kind of good and kind of bad because it was kind of boring.” The researcher asked Ximena for further clarification to which Ximena responded with a detail from the plot of the book. In her written reflection on literature circles, Ximena wrote, “It was good. I liked it.” As with Naomi and Will, Ximena did not offer any beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable characteristics of literature circles that the researcher would classify under the categories of student choice, cooperative learning, or self-management.

Student Voice in Literature Circles

Results and findings for the third subquestion are discussed below. The final subquestion posed by the researcher asked: Do reluctant and/or struggling readers perceive themselves as having their voices heard during literature circle participation, and why do they say so? The researcher’s predicted pattern in Chapter Three stated that

participants would perceive their voices as being heard during literature circle participation due to the conversational nature of meetings as well as because they are required to share their unique perspectives via their assigned roles. As aforementioned, the predicted pattern was not met for any of the seven participants although for various reasons.

Grace

In the pre-interview, Grace stated that she could share her feelings with both Mrs. Ian and her best friend, Naomi. Grace stated that she had to "get louder" at times in order to express to her peers that something was bothering her but only when it is very hurtful. Concerning her experience in literature circle, Grace characterized it as pleasurable because "we get to express like how we feel about the book." In the post-interview, Grace felt as though she contributed to her literature circle by helping her peers to understand both the text and her unique point of view. Grace did not feel as though participating in a literature circle changed her peers' perspective of her role in Mrs. Ian's class. In the focus group, Grace remarked that she felt comfortable enough to share her opinions about a book with Mrs. Ian. Grace gave an example of what she might tell Mrs. Ian, "I don't like it. It's boring to me, and I don't want to read it." Grace stated that Mrs. Ian kept secrets confidential whereas her classmates would not. Grace stated that participating in literature circles did not change how much she shared in class because she already felt comfortable enough to share her feelings with Mrs. Ian.

Humberto

Humberto stated that he could not share his feelings in class because doing so was "kind of bad" in the pre-interview. Yet Humberto felt as though his classmates listened to what he had to say. In the post-interview, Humberto shared that he did not feel as though he had anything of valuable to contribute to the literature circle meetings. Unfortunately, Humberto did not offer his reasoning behind this statement. During the focus group, Humberto stated that literature circles allow for more conversations than the students are usually allotted. Much like his peers, Humberto felt comfortable sharing his feelings with Mrs. Ian but not his classmates both prior to and after participating literature circles. The researcher observed Humberto's literature circle members ignoring Humberto or blatantly barring his participation, which is further described further in the researcher's discussion of the group dynamics in literature circles in Chapter Five.

Lucita

When questioned as to whether others listened to what she had to say, Lucita originally answered "nuh uh" but then changed her answer to "sometimes." Lucita stated that when her voice was heard by her peers, it was because the topic of conversation was social. Like her peers, Lucita felt comfortable sharing her feelings with Mrs. Ian because she was trustworthy. Lucita expressed discomfort in sharing her feelings with her peers, offering "Because some of them like to read and some of them don't." Lucita added that she would be embarrassed in front of peers whom she considered to be better readers than her, stating, "not 'cause they're laughing but just they think that, 'Well, she doesn't like to read.'" In the post-interview, Lucita stated that she felt as though she fit in well with her peers, adding that she fit in with the boys because she was athletic and liked soccer

and fit in with the girls because she also likes "girly things." Lucita was unsure if literature circles helped her to fit in with her peers, however. In the focus group, Lucita agreed with her peers that participating in literature circles did not change how much she shared in class because she already felt comfortable enough to share her feelings with Mrs. Ian. The researcher observed Lucita often being overshadowed by her peers during literature circle meetings.

Naomi

In our pre-interview, Naomi indicated feeling comfortable expressing herself in class because she knew that her friends would listen to her. Naomi also shared that she felt as if Mrs. Ian listened to her and that she could express herself even if she were upset. In the post-interview, Naomi remarked that she did not feel as though she had anything of value to contribute to her literature circle. When asked why, Naomi responded, "Because it was just our job and so we did our job, but there wasn't really anything to do so it wasn't really a job." Naomi seemingly did not feel as though the varying roles were of importance. In the focus group, Naomi stated that she shared her feelings in class regardless of literature circle participation. She agreed with her peers that participating in literature circles did not change how much she shared in class because she already felt comfortable enough to share her feelings with Mrs. Ian.

Tomás

In the pre-interview, Tomás stated that he felt comfortable sharing his feelings with Mrs. Ian. He quickly added that he would not share his feelings with his classmates because he could not trust them as they might tell others something that he told them in

confidence. In the post-interview, Tomás stated that reading was something of value that he contributed to his literature circle meetings. As previously mentioned, Tomás was not present for the focus group session. Thus, a sense of voice in the case of Tomás, as with the other participants, was absent.

Will

In the pre-interview, Will shared that he felt comfortable both sharing his feelings and expressing himself in Mrs. Ian's class, but he did not provide a reason for feeling that way. Later, in the post-interview, Will stated that he did not feel as though he had anything of value to contribute to his literature circle. As previously mentioned, Will was most vocal during the focus group session. At that time, Will responded to the question as to whether literature circles changed how one shares his or her feelings in class by saying, "Not even close." During the focus group, Will remarked that Mrs. Ian kept secrets confidential unless it concerned a worrisome situation then she might have to share it with the principal or another teacher.

Ximena

In the pre-interview, Ximena stated that she could share her feelings with Mrs. Ian. Regarding her peers, however, Ximena expressed discomfort in sharing her feelings by saying, "Nuh uh. Only to certain people 'cause some people judge me." When asked if her voice was heard by her peers, Ximena responded, "Sometimes...they just take my idea." In the post-interview, Ximena stated that her role sheet was the only thing of value that she contributed to her literature circle meetings. In the focus group, Ximena was in agreeance with her peers that participating in literature circles did not change how much

she shared in class because she already felt comfortable enough to share her feelings with Mrs. Ian.

In Mrs. Ian's opinion, participating in literature circles impacted student voice in her classroom. Mrs. Ian stated,

Mainly because I saw them taking more ownership and responsibility within literature circles. And the more I gave them that power, the more they were willing to speak up, especially when I made it very clear that in order to fully participate, everyone had to be prepared.

However, the researcher argues that Mrs. Ian was speaking more to an increase in student self-management as opposed to student voice and expression. The researcher further addresses the lack of student voice in the observed literature circles in Chapter Five.

Results and findings for within-case analysis for each research question were discussed in the preceding sections of this chapter. Cross-case analysis for each research question is presented below.

Cross-case Analysis

The research design of an embedded multiple case study necessitated both within-case and cross-case analysis. As the results and findings of within-case data analysis were discussed in the preceding sections, the researcher will now discuss the results and findings of cross-case analysis. As suggested by Yin (2014), the researcher created Table 4.4 (on the next page) to display the results of the pattern matching conducted for within-case analysis.

Qualitative research scholar Stake (1995) insists that qualitative researchers state the propositional, or explicated, generalizations that emerge from their analyses and interpretation of the data. Two propositional generalizations emerged, which correlate to the primary research and first subquestions underlying this study.

Table 4.4.

Pattern matching for study participants.

Participant	Pattern 1: self-efficacy	Pattern 2: motivation/enjoyment	Pattern 3: characteristics	Pattern 4: voice
Grace	Met	Met	Met	Not met*
Humberto	Met	Met	Met	Not met**
Lucita	Met	Met	Met	Not met**
Naomi	Met	Met	Not met*	Not met**
Tomás	Met	Met	Met	Not met*
Will	Met	Met	Not met*	Not met*
Ximena	Met	Met	Not met*	Not met**

*Insufficient support from quantitative and/or qualitative data

**Predicted pattern not met as supported by quantitative and/or qualitative data.

The first propositional generalization is that participating in literature circles has a positive influence on the self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers. After participating in literature circles, the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers improved as supported by both quantitative and qualitative data. Secondly, reluctant and/or struggling readers were more motivated to read and/or found reading more enjoyable following literature circle participation than they did previously.

However, due to a lack of uniformity, the researcher could not formulate a propositional generalization for the characteristics, if any, of literature circles that reluctant and/or struggling readers characterized as beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable (second subquestion). Four of the seven participants characterized literature circle participation as beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable in some way. However, the three remaining participants did not. Finally, a generalization for the influence of literature circle participation upon student voice (third subquestion) could not be established for any of the seven cases that participated in this study.

The results and findings that emerged from this study during data analysis are summarized in the succeeding section.

Summary of Findings

The results and findings of this study suggest that literature circle participation influenced the reader self-efficacy of the reluctant and/or struggling readers who participated in this study. According to pre- and post-test results from the Reader Self-Perception Scale—an instrument developed by Henk & Melnick (1995) specifically to measure the reader self-efficacy of intermediate-grades students—literature circle participation improved the reader self-efficacy of the reluctant and/or struggling readers who participated in this study. Additionally, these findings were supported by qualitative data, as discussed earlier in this chapter. Subsequently, the researcher predicted that participants' motivation to and/or enjoyment of reading would increase after participating in literature circles. Findings from primarily qualitative but also quantitative data analysis suggest that this pattern was also met. Results and findings from this study are limited in regards to two of the researcher's subquestions.

Neither the quantitative nor qualitative data collected for this study supported two of the researcher's subquestions. As discussed earlier in this chapter, results and findings were mixed in terms of the participant's characterizations of beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable aspects of literature circle participation. Four of the participants characterized the cooperative nature of literature circles as beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable; however, the remaining three participants did not. Therefore, results and findings from this study were limited in this regard. Finally, results and findings from this study did not indicate that literature circle participation increased student voice. Although

the results and findings from this study were mixed to some regard, the researcher argues that this study is of value in terms of its contributions to the literature and field of literacy.

The researcher's discussion of the conclusions and implications drawn from the results and findings outlined in this chapter are discussed in Chapter Five along with study limitations and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

Summary, Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Through this study, the researcher sought to explore the influence of literature circle participation on the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers. In Chapter One, the researcher argued for the need for a more student-centered approach to literacy, especially in an era of high-stakes accountability. In the current era of schooling, student-centered English language arts and reading instruction is relatively minimal. Of typical English language arts and reading instruction, Marchiando (2013) wrote,

Imagine a classroom of students sitting at their desks, while their teacher walks around the room with her manual in her hand reading aloud the story of the week and asking the students questions about the story. Fast forward 30 minutes and you might see a group of students at the guided reading table where they are reading a leveled book and again answering questions that the teacher asks about the reading. Later in the same classroom, you might see the students engaged in silent reading and maybe even responding to their reading in a journal...[R]eading instruction looks very similar in many elementary classrooms. In fact, this instruction closely reflects the balanced literacy approach that teachers today are encouraged to utilize. What is arguably missing, however, from this “balanced” approach to literacy is any chance for students to engage with one another about the books they are reading and to have control over their own literacy learning (p. 13).

Aside from not having the opportunity to engage in text-based conversations and take ownership over their literacy, Beers (1996) added that state-mandated examinations lead many teachers to focus more on developing reading skills than fostering their students’ enjoyment of reading. Though building students’ repertoires of literacy skills and strategies is certainly necessary for academic success, teachers must also seek to foster

their students' enjoyment of reading, especially to encourage independent reading both inside and outside the classroom.

Independent reading is just one of five instructional contexts for reading, yet independent reading is important because it provides a context for students to apply their literacy learning to their own reading while enjoying a text of their choosing (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017). Furthermore, independent reading (in or out of school) is associated with gains in reading achievement (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). Students who engage in large amounts of independent reading score about ten percent higher on reading assessments than those who read a little or not at all (Daniels & Steineke, 2004). A relationship between literature circles and independent reading exists as Daniels (2002) writes, “[L]iterature circles are a form of independent reading, structured as collaborative groups, and guided by reader response principles” (p. 38). Teachers should encourage their students to engage in independent reading, especially those who are reluctant and/or struggling readers. Strickland & Walker (2004) denoted the importance of independent reading for reluctant and/or struggling readers by asserting that “at-risk” students learn to read by truly engaging in authentic reading.

This study focused on reluctant readers who are capable of reading yet avoid doing so whenever possible as well as struggling readers for whom reading is a challenge. Regarding reluctant readers, Beers (1996) wrote that many become entrapped in a vicious cycle in which they do not engage in reading, which makes reading more difficult for them, and consequently, less enjoyable. English language arts and reading classrooms that heavily emphasize preparation for standardized tests, therefore, do little to alter the negative perception of reading held by reluctant readers. Heavy emphasis on

specific reading skills to improve the test scores of struggling readers can likewise be detrimental. Day et al. (2002) wrote, “When placed in instructional contexts that focus on isolated reading skills, [struggling readers] have few opportunities to develop these strategies” (p. 134). Furthermore, struggling readers suffer when the reading process is limited to strategic reading over thoughtful reading (Potenza-Radis, 2010). In contrast, literature circles present an authentic and meaningful context for students to further develop and utilize their reading skills and strategies. Additionally, Fredricks (2012) asserted that literature circles can be used to steer the context of instruction away from Freire’s conception of the banking model of education.

In Chapter Two, the researcher described the metamorphosis of Freire’s banking concept of education and social efficiency curricular ideology into new managerialism which pervades today’s educational system. New managerialism emphasizes testing and accountability, which can easily strip the joy of learning from the classroom. Chapter Two also described literature circles in greater detail as well as presented findings from previous research relevant to this study. Prior to collecting data for this study, the researcher hypothesized in Chapter Three that literature circles would positively influence the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers. The results and findings of this study were discussed in Chapter Four. In this final chapter, the researcher discusses the implications of the results and findings of this study as well as limitations and recommendations for further research. The researcher first summarizes this study.

Summary of the Study

The site of this study was an intermediate-grades classroom within a central Texas Montessori magnet school. Upon obtaining permission to conduct research from the

campus principal and classroom teacher, the researcher conducted a whole-class administration of the Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995). Criterion-based purposeful sampling was employed to identify potential study participants. The criterion for participation in this study was low reader self-efficacy as indicated by a student's score on the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS). Both parental consent and minor (participant) assent were obtained for seven students, each of whom became a case in this embedded multiple case study. After establishing the participation of seven cases, the researcher began data collection.

Several forms of data were collected for this study. Participation in this study involved an individual interview with the researcher before beginning the observed literature circles (i.e. pre-interview). The researcher observed each case as each student participated in literature circles over an eight-week period between November 2016 and January 2017, excluding Thanksgiving and Christmas breaks. Each week, the researcher wrote observational notes for each case as well as collected the role sheet prepared by each participant in preparation for his or her literature circle meeting. Once literature circles concluded, the researcher conducted another whole-class administration of the Reader Self-Perception Scale as a post-test. Subsequently, the researcher conducted an individual interview with each case (i.e. post-interview). Six of the seven cases met for a focus group discussion following the individual post-interviews. Finally, the researcher interviewed the classroom teacher, Mrs. Ian (pseudonym), before engaging in analysis of the collected data.

As this study had an embedded multiple case study design, data analysis involved both within-case and cross-case analysis. For within-case analysis, the researcher

determined whether literature circle participation influenced each case in a previously predicted manner. For cross-case analysis, the researcher wrote propositional generalizations that evolved from this study for the participants collectively. The results and findings of both within-case and cross-case analysis were described in Chapter Four. Before delving into the discussion and implications of this study, however, the researcher will revisit the research questions that underlied this study.

Research Questions

Four research questions related to the primary purpose of this study guided the researcher's data collection and analysis. The primary purpose of this study was to determine if literature circle participation had a positive influence on reader self-efficacy, especially that of reluctant and/or struggling readers. The research question and subquestions are listed below.

1. How do literature circles influence the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers? (central research question)
2. How do reluctant and/or struggling readers describe themselves as readers after participating in literature circles and upon what do they base these descriptions? (first subquestion)
3. What, if any, characteristics of participating in literature circles do reluctant and/or struggling readers perceive as beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable? (second subquestion)
4. Do reluctant and/or struggling readers perceive themselves as having their voices heard during literature circle participation, and why do they say so? (third subquestion)

Prior to delving into the discussion and implication of this study, it is important for the researcher to elaborate on the context of this study.

Context of this Study

The context of this study undoubtedly influenced the results and findings that emerged during data analysis. The researcher provides further insight into the school at which data for this study was collected below, as context became an important factor.

School Context

The school enrolled students in pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade. Although this study was conducted during the 2016-2017 school year, school accountability ratings and demographic information for this year have yet to be released. Therefore, the researcher was reliant upon such information from the previous (i.e. 2015-2016) school year. In terms of student demographics, 79.7% of enrollees were considered to be economically disadvantaged and 50.8% were deemed at-risk (Texas Education Agency, 2016). The school had a minority-majority population in terms of race and ethnicity as 61.5% of students were Latino and 16.7% were Black (Texas Education Agency, 2016). White students comprised 19.3% of the student population (Texas Education Agency, 2016). Given the racial/ethnic composition and socioeconomic status of the school population, the researcher argues that the school served a marginalized population.

For the 2015-2016 school year, the school earned a state accountability rating of *Met Standard* (Texas Education Agency, 2016). As this study occurred in an intermediate-grades classroom (i.e. a classroom in which fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-grade students are combined), the researcher focused on the assessment results of students at

these grade levels. For the 2015-2016 school year, 64% of fourth-grade students performed at or above the satisfactory standard on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) reading assessment (Texas Education Agency, 2016). Similarly, 69% of fifth-grade students and 64% of sixth-grade students performed at or above the satisfactory standard (Texas Education Agency, 2016).

Despite earning an acceptable state accountability rating, the importance of performing well on the annual battery of state standardized assessments (i.e. STAAR) was stressed to faculty, parents, and students. A message to parents from the campus principal expressed gratitude for parental support in helping the school to not only meet state standards during the 2015-2016 school year but also each of the four targets set by the Texas Education Agency. Additionally, students in tested grade levels (i.e. third-through eighth-grades) were subjected to a District Based Assessment, or DBA, during the spring semester. The District Based Assessment involved students taking a mock STAAR examination utilizing released items from the previous school year's STAAR test. The DBA was administered to students prior to the 2016-2017 STAAR examinations.

The researcher began observing and interacting with students in September 2016, prior to their participation in the literature circles that were observed for this study. Based on the researcher's observation, the school had minimal issues with discipline. For the 2014-2015 school year, only 1.4% of students had disciplinary placements compared with 4.3% of students district-wide (Texas Education Agency, 2016). Teachers and administrators sought to create a communal atmosphere. In a message to parents and

guardians, the campus principal reiterated a desire to serve both the school and community.

Though situated within a public school district, the school was unique in that it was both a designated Montessori and a magnet school. Families wanting to enroll their children in the school could gain entrance through a lottery system. The school was also supposed to adhere to a Montessori model. According to Isaacs (2015), the Montessori approach to education incorporates a variety of activities designed to meet students' individual needs as well as support their need for freedom. Lillard (2013) added that in the Montessori approach to education, "[F]ree choice exists at the macrolevel of classroom environment: most of the time, most Montessori students choose what they work on" (p. 165-166). Based on the researcher's observations, the tenets of Montessori education were largely absent from the classroom in which data for this study was collected. Additional insight into the classroom context is provided below.

Mrs. Ian and the Classroom Context

As discussed in Chapters One and Three, a colleague of the researcher served as a gatekeeper to the study participants. This colleague was a fine-arts teacher at the school in which this study was conducted and introduced the researcher to a teacher who agreed to allow data collection to occur in her classroom. However, over the summer, this teacher was reassigned from teaching English language arts and reading to teaching mathematics. At the beginning of the 2016-2017 school year, the researcher was thereby introduced to Mrs. Ian, the teacher in whose classroom data for this study was collected. Mrs. Ian and the researcher met in August 2016 to discuss the researcher's plan for data

collection. As the researcher discusses in the next section, data collection did not unfold as the researcher originally intended.

The 2016-2017 school year was Mrs. Ian's third year of teaching and likewise, third year at the school in which this study was conducted. Mrs. Ian had previously integrated literature circles into her classroom as a first-year teacher. On her initial experience with literature circles, Mrs. Ian remarked,

I was not a huge fan, but I think that had more to do with myself being ill-prepared to kind of tackle such a big undertaking with so many students and so many students with different reading levels and it also being my first-year teaching.

Mrs. Ian did not attempt literature circles during her second year of teaching. Instead she incorporated what she called "small reading groups and reading studies." Mrs. Ian shared that part of her motivation to reintegrate literature circles into her classroom was to move away from "teacher-led lesson plans about understanding what we're reading" and to engage her students in reading for pleasure.

The school's emphasis on meeting state accountability standards understandably affected Mrs. Ian's classroom. In February 2017, the researcher observed Mrs. Ian having a stern conversation with her fifth-grade students. During this conversation, Mrs. Ian communicated her disappointment to her fifth-grade students about their collective lackluster performance on the District Based Assessment. Mrs. Ian stressed to her students the importance of preparing for the upcoming STAAR examination and doing one's best on standardized assessments as well as her confidence that they could perform better on the upcoming STAAR examination than they had on the DBA.

Based on the researcher's observations, Mrs. Ian's classroom was primarily teacher-centered. At the beginning of each week, students received what Mrs. Ian termed

a *work plan*, which outlined the assignments that they were to complete during the week along with their due dates. Students were relatively free to choose the order in which they completed their assignments as well as when to work on them; this was the most Montessorian element of Mrs. Ian's classroom observed by the researcher. Outside of literature circles, independent work in English language arts and reading involved students completing worksheets focused on grammar and writing mechanics, responding to journal prompts, and answering questions from a textbook. The kind of teacher-centered instruction observed in Mrs. Ian's classroom echoed Marchiando's (2013) description of typical English language arts and reading instruction. The researcher argues that too often English language arts and reading instruction fails to provide students with an opportunity to read and foster an appreciation of authentic literature while simultaneously honing their literacy. Thus, the researcher designed this study to explore a more student-centered approach to literacy via literature circles. The context of the literature circles observed for this study are discussed further below.

Literature Circles in Mrs. Ian's Classroom

As mentioned in the preceding section, the literature circles observed for this study did not function as the researcher and Mrs. Ian originally discussed. However, the researcher is thankful that Mrs. Ian graciously agreed to participate in this study on relatively short notice.

During the 2016-2017 school year, 19 students—including a student with a learning disability—were enrolled in Mrs. Ian's classroom. All 19 students participated in literature circles although only seven served as cases in this study. The seven cases did not comprise one literature circle but were intermingled with their peers (non-

participants) each week. The researcher intended for one literature circle to form around a specific text (e.g. *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster). The membership of each literature circle would thereby remain consistent because only one literature circle would read *The Phantom Tollbooth* while the other literature circles would read and discuss a different text unique to their respective groups. However, as discussed in Chapter Four, the class collectively voted to read the same text, *Rules* by Cynthia Lord. The decision for the entire class to read *Rules* allowed Mrs. Ian to change the membership of each literature circle from week-to-week. Instead of the membership of each literature circle remaining static as the researcher intended, the group dynamic of each literature circle was fluid throughout the eight-week cycle. Additionally, the researcher was informed by Will, a participant in this study, that a different teacher used *Rules* as a read-aloud book during the previous school year. Thus, some of the students in Mrs. Ian's class were already familiar with the text.

Finally, Mrs. Ian did not include the role of Critical Profiler as the researcher intended. The role of Critical Profiler was developed by Soares (2010) to evaluate and challenge sociocultural influences in the text. The researcher planned for the addition of the Critical Profiler role to strengthen this study's connection to the theoretical framework of critical literacy. However, only the conventional roles of Discussion Director, Literacy Luminary, Word Wizard, Connector, Artful Artist, and Summarizer were included by Mrs. Ian.

The researcher argues that the context of this study influenced the results and findings of this study, especially for the second and third subquestions. In the next

section, the researcher presents the discussion and implications of the results and findings, which were detailed in Chapter Four.

Discussion and Implications

The results and findings from this study, discussed in Chapter Four, have several implications for the English language arts and reading classroom. Additionally, data collected from this study aligns with previous research conducted on literature circles, as discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Connection to Existing Literature

Results and findings from this study connect to existing literature written on literature circles. Researchers have found that literature circles are effective in leading children to adopt reading habits (Burda, 2000), and findings from this study suggest the same. As explained in greater detail in Chapter Four, Tomás was characterized as both a reluctant and struggling reader. In responding to a question concerning changes in Tomás as a reader, Mrs. Ian noted a change in his reading habits and remarked,

Yes! As a reader, definitely. [Tomás has] already asked to borrow two or three books out of my teacher library, and now he asks me, 'Can I go outside and read?'... I mean, I've seen it happen before with students where they are struggling readers and then the minute they finally get it, now they want to read everything. And so he wants to read his book over and over and over again.

According to Mrs. Ian, the reading habits of other study participants changed as well. As discussed in Chapter Two, the goal of literacy instruction is to equip students with the reading skills needed to digest authentic literature (Cooper et al., 2015). Within the context of this study, literature circles did just that in the cases of Lucita and Ximena. Mrs. Ian remarked that literature circles gave Lucita an opportunity to practice reading skills that she was continuing to develop. Mrs. Ian explained further, "I think literature

circles kind of helped... So when we're doing a lesson, it didn't just stop in the lesson, now it bridged over, and so it gave [Lucita] lots of practice." Like Lucita, Mrs. Ian noted changes in Ximena's reading habits by stating, "I think through the literature circles and through a lot of the work [Ximena's] done this year... I can tell that it's helped her in a lot of different ways." Mrs. Ian added that following her participation in literature circles, Ximena's ability to answer questions has improved and she "[has] evidence to back up what she's read." In addition to building the reading habits of participants, literature circles provided an avenue for peer scaffolding.

Both this study and previous research suggest that literature circles allow for peer-scaffolding of learning. Peer-scaffolding refers to a more knowledgeable and/or skilled peer providing support to a classmate to facilitate his or her learning. Smith (2012) noted that the co-construction of meaning enabled by literature circles allows for students to model their thought processes for their peers. Grace exemplified this as she scaffolded literacy learning for her peers. Observation notes written by the researcher throughout the eight-weeks of literature circle meetings highlight this factor. Upon reflecting on the second literature circle meeting, the researcher wrote, "Grace used the text as evidence to counter a peer's statement" regarding Grace's offering of an alternate, text-based perspective. As the Literacy Luminary in week four, Grace chose a passage from the text selection that encapsulated the chapter, whereas her counterparts often chose humorous passages. In week six, Grace correctly identified the author's purpose behind writing *Rules* as wanting the reader to know what it's like to have a loved one or friend with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The researcher wrote the following observational notes in week seven, "[Grace] helped Lucita to define two words, 'nutmeg' and 'stroking.'

[Grace] exhibited her literary knowledge by explaining to her peers what ‘genre’ means.” In reflecting upon his participation in literature circles, Humberto commented (in Chapter Four) that literature circles helped him to better understand the book. Humberto’s comment suggests that he benefitted from his peers’ scaffolding. In addition to presenting an avenue for peer scaffolding of learning, literature circle participation increased students’ self-confidence as readers.

Prior research has shown that literature circles increase students’ self-confidence as readers (Blum et al., 2002; Lewis, 1997, Pitman, 1997), and findings from this study suggest the same. With regards to this study, Mrs. Ian noted that the self-confidence of two participants whom she characterized as struggling readers improved following their participation in literature circles. Prior to literature circles, Mrs. Ian painted a picture of Tomás as a struggling, unconfident reader but noted that Tomás’ confidence as a reader improved following his participation in literature circles. Mrs. Ian remarked, “During literature circles, I saw several changes with [Tomás], and I think because he has struggled in the past and is currently still struggling, I think he—it was a lack of confidence that I was noticing before.” Similarly, in describing Ximena as a reader following her participation in literature circles, Mrs. Ian remarked, “[Ximena’s] become a stronger reader. She’s less reluctant; she seems more confident.” While literature circles may improve the self-confidence of young readers, previous research in conjunction with this study denote the at times negative influence that the group dynamics of literature circles can have upon participants, as well.

As discussed later in this chapter, the changing group composition of the literature circles observed for this study influenced the participation of several cases. Allen, Möller,

& Stroup (2003) wrote that literature circles can become power-laden when students position themselves socially based on their respective abilities. This power-laden structure was observed in this study as well, particularly in the juxtaposing cases of Grace and Lucita. Grace, who repeatedly demonstrated her literacy-related knowledge and skills, emerged as a dominant force in the initial literature circle meetings. Grace quickly positioned herself as a leader even when she was not assigned the role of Discussion Director and initially inhibited the participation of others, such as Humberto, Lucita, and Ximena. Over the course of the eight literature circle meetings, however, Grace became less domineering and more cooperative as she transitioned to a facilitator of her peers' learning. In contrast, the participation of Lucita, whom Mrs. Ian characterized as a struggling reader, was often limited by her peers. Observational notes written by the researcher illustrate Lucita's limited thinking about the text and simultaneously her peers' assertion of power over her. In week one, the researcher wrote, "[Lucita] contributed some to the literature circle but it was dominated by Grace...The sentence that Lucita chose as Literacy Luminary wasn't really pivotal to the chapter that they read." Observational notes from week two echo this sentiment, "Lucita seemed to parrot the responses of a peer. She was the youngest member of her literature circle and did not contribute as much. It seemed as though her peers included her as an after-thought." The researcher commented on Lucita's thinking in week six by recording, "Lucita participates in the literature circle meetings each week, but her answers are without depth and complexity. Her answers are surface-level and do not illustrate critical thinking." In the final literature circle meeting, Lucita's peers called on her to participate in the discussion, yet as she began to respond they engaged in conversations amongst themselves.

Understandably, Lucita was hesitant to participate afterwards and asked a peer to read her role sheet for her. The influence of the group dynamics of literature circles emerged as a prominent implication of this study, which is discussed following a description of the four themes that emerged from this study.

Study Themes

During data analysis, four themes emerged from this study. Each theme correlates to one of the research questions postulated by the researcher prior to conducting this study.

Theme one: Reader self-efficacy following literature circle participation. The first theme was that literature circle participation positively influenced the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers. As discussed in Chapter Four, this theme was supported by both quantitative and qualitative data.

Theme two: Motivation and/or enjoyment of reading following literature circle participation. The second theme was that reluctant and/or struggling readers described themselves as more motivated to read and/or stated that they found reading to be more enjoyable following their participation in literature circles. The second theme was primarily supported by qualitative data.

Theme three: Beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable characteristics of literature circles. The third theme that emerged from this study was that each case described at least one characteristic of literature circles as beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable. As described in Chapter Four, the researcher predicted that the participants would

characterize the elements of student choice, the cooperative nature of literature circles, and self-management as beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable. Four of the seven cases (i.e. Grace, Humberto, Lucita, and Tomás) met the predicted pattern by characterizing the cooperative nature of literature circles in a positive manner. Although the predicted pattern was unmet for the remaining three cases, each of these three cases still ascribed a characteristic of literature circles as positive. In all three instances, each case (i.e. Naomi, Will, and Ximena) characterized literature circles as less boring than the typical English language arts and reading instruction received. Qualitative data supported the third theme.

In relation to the third theme, the researcher argues that the participants did not identify student choice and/or self-management as beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable characteristics of literature circles for two reasons: (1) According to Mrs. Ian, the entire class chose to read the same book (i.e. *Rules* by Cynthia Lord), which eradicated student choice, and (2) Mrs. Ian exhibited quite a bit of control in regards to literature circles, which limited the opportunities for self-management. As previously mentioned, for example, Mrs. Ian mandated that the Discussion Directors choose questions from her question box as opposed to creating their own, which mitigated students' self-management of their groups. The aforementioned factors, therefore, essentially limited the predicted pattern to only the cooperative nature of literature circles. Thus, if a case did not express that the cooperative nature of literature circles was a beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable characteristic of his or her participation then the researcher's predicted pattern was unmet.

Theme four: Student voice during literature circles. The fourth theme was that literature circle participation did not influence student voice. In Chapter Four, the researcher described how qualitative data supported this theme for four of the seven cases (i.e. Humberto, Lucita, Naomi, and Ximena). In terms of the remaining three cases (i.e. Grace, Tomás, and Will), a lack of support from the collected data contributed towards this theme.

The researcher attributes two extemporaneous factors to the predicted pattern of student voice being unmet: (1) The questions posed by the researcher admittedly did not truly capture the essence of voice but more so the participants' comfort with expressing their feelings in class, and (2) Had the membership of each literature circle remained static, there would have been more of an opportunity for student voice as students would arguably have learned to listen to and work with their group members over time. Through Mrs. Ian's changing the membership each week, the students learned to work in groups with peers whom they may not have preferred to work; however, this provided the students an opportunity to refuse to cooperate during that week (as in the case of Naomi) because they knew that they would most likely work with different peers the following week. Both factors therefore contributed to the predicted pattern being unmet for each case.

There are several implications stemming from the results and findings of this study. Perhaps the chief implication is that of the influence of group dynamics on literature circle participation. The researcher discusses the implications that emerged from this study in greater detail below.

Study Implications

In addition to the emergence of four themes, the results and findings of this study have several implications. The most prevalent implication is that of the influence of the group dynamics of literature circles.

The influence of group dynamics on literature circle participation. The predominant implication that emerged from this study is that group dynamics influenced the literature circle participation of several cases. As previously mentioned in this chapter, all 19 students in Mrs. Ian's class read the same text, which impacted the grouping of the literature circles in that it allowed Mrs. Ian to change the membership of each literature circle from week-to-week. Each literature circle had heterogenous membership in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, affinity for reading, reading ability, and participation in this study (i.e. study participants and non-participants intermingled). The researcher asked Mrs. Ian to share her motivation behind this dynamic grouping. Mrs. Ian responded,

I know my students, and they get very comfortable, and if I don't change up who they're working with then they will only work half as hard. I think when I'm constantly changing things, and they know that 'Hey, this group is going to change.' I find that they tend to—especially if I orchestrate it just right—their groups—I can get kids to pull things out of each other that they wouldn't normally pull. And I was trying to give them the opportunity to talk to people that they normally don't talk to in class, and I wanted them to really see that each had their value and everyone had an opinion. And so I really wanted to teach them that collaborative learning is about learning to work with any and everybody. So that was my motivation.

Below, the researcher describes the participation of each case as well as the influence of the group dynamics of literature circles upon him or her.

In the first half of the literature circle meetings, Grace was a dominant force. During the initial literature circle meeting, Grace dominated the discussion aside from the Discussion Director. The researcher observed Grace interrupting Humberto and interjecting her own responses. On a separate occasion, Grace blatantly told Ximena how to respond to a question yet rejected a peer when he attempted to do the same to her. Though at times she engaged in off-task behavior, Grace quickly corrected her off-task peers. However, in the latter half of literature circles, Grace transitioned from a socially dominant force to a helpful peer. Grace no longer corrected her peers in a brash manner, as in the initial literature circle meetings, but instead began to scaffold her peers' learning. For example, Lucita, who was assigned the role of Word Wizard, needed help defining the two words that she selected, and Grace happily helped Lucita to define them. During the seventh literature circle meeting, Grace played the role of Discussion Director. Grace was deliberate in seeking a response from each member of her literature circle. A student with a learning disability who did not previously participate in literature circles joined Grace's group in week eight. Grace modeled maturity for her peers as she actively listened to this student share his perspective on the text. Additionally, Grace exhibited leadership in helping her peers who were confused as to the assignment given by Mrs. Ian to understand the task at hand. Throughout the eight weeks of observed literature circles, Grace was an active participant and leader in her group. However, Grace was initially an off-putting leader who quickly seized control. In the latter half of literature circle meetings, Grace embraced a role more akin to a facilitator. Mrs. Ian seemingly agreed by stating,

I tried to create groupings with them where they were working with lots of different people and so I think that... it kind of kept [Grace] on her toes a little bit.

She couldn't always dominate. She couldn't always be the one in charge. Everyone had to be in charge so I think that helped her begin to learn collaborative learning.

Though the dynamic grouping of literature circles benefitted Grace in helping her to relinquish control and learn to cooperate with others, Humberto was seemingly negatively affected by the ever-changing group dynamic.

At times, Humberto's participation in literature circles was limited by his peers. In week one, Humberto was assigned the role of Artful Artist, a seemingly fitting role as Humberto previously expressed to the researcher that he enjoyed being creative. Humberto was visibly proud of his illustration and eager to share it with his peers. Yet he was frequently prohibited from sharing his role sheet by Grace. When the researcher joined Humberto's literature circle in week four, he was visibly frustrated, sharing with the researcher, "No one even cares about their jobs." For an unknown reason, Humberto had not previously prepared for his assigned role of Discussion Director, yet he was eager to lead the group. However, a female student prohibited Humberto from participating in the literature circle until the researcher corrected her. In the final literature circle meeting, after sharing their responses, Humberto's peers were dismissive of his interjections that he was ready to share his responses and conveyed their disinterest. Though ostracized at times by his peers, Humberto demonstrated consideration for his fellow literature circle members while acting as the Discussion Director by not only soliciting participation from each member but also respecting their unique answers. Similarly, Humberto allowed each member to share his or her response to a question he posed before sharing his own. Nevertheless, the evolving group composition of the literature circles each week negatively influenced Humberto. The researcher argues that of the seven participants, Humberto was most negatively affected by the continual regrouping of the literature

circles. Though Humberto was an eager and active participant in his literature circle each week, the researcher argues that he did not benefit as much as he potentially could have because he was so greatly affected by the group dynamics of his literature circle. In the pre-interview, Humberto expressed that he enjoyed reading in groups. Despite being precluded at times from participating in literature circles, Humberto expressed on his final role sheet that he enjoyed literature circles because it made it easier to learn about the book. In speaking of Humberto, Mrs. Ian stated,

I think for [Humberto] it had a lot to do with who he was comfortable with, the students that he was working with—they had a lot to do with how he felt about literature circles. I think they had a bigger influence about—on him—than even the literature circles or even the book we were reading. I think just being comfortable around—in those social settings.

Much like Humberto, Lucita was negatively impacted by the continually changing group dynamics of literature circles.

Lucita was often overshadowed by her peers throughout the eight-week duration of literature circles. Lucita contributed minimally to her first literature circle as it was dominated by Grace and the Discussion Director. In week two, Lucita, the youngest member of her literature circle, parroted the responses of a sixth-grade peer. Additionally, the researcher wrote on the observational protocol, “It seemed as though [Lucita’s] peers included her as an after-thought” During the seventh literature circle meeting, Lucita again mimicked her peers’ responses by changing them ever so slightly. Lucita’s participation in her literature circle was most limited in the final literature circle meeting. During this meeting, Lucita’s peers called on her to share her responses but as soon as she began to respond, they ignored her and engaged in side conversations. The group called on Lucita to respond again yet she was understandably reluctant to do so, replying,

“I’m not here.” Subsequently, a fifth-grade peer read Lucita’s role sheet for her. The group dynamics of literature circles had the least impact on Lucita when she was assigned the role of Discussion Director. Like Humberto, as Discussion Director, Lucita sought to involve each member by asking for each individual’s response to the question that she posed. Mrs. Ian did not explicitly comment on how the social composition of literature circles impacted Lucita. In the post-interview, Lucita admitted to the researcher that she can be shy, and the researcher felt as though this played a role in how much Lucita was willing to share with a new group each week. Additionally, as one of the younger students in the class, Lucita’s participation was often limited by her older peers whether of her own volition (as when she mimicked their answers) or on their part (as when they ignored her). Naomi was also influenced by the variety of groupings yet more so as an actor and less as being acted upon as in the case of Lucita.

Naomi seemingly benefitted the least from literature circles primarily because she was the most reluctant to actively engage in each meeting. The researcher’s observation notes from the second literature circle meeting read,

Naomi seemed disinterested in the literature circle. She chose several words as the Word Wizard, but she did not share them with the group. Rather, a peer share her words with the group...Naomi’s attitude was nonchalant. She did not seem to want to participate and spent most of the time playing around with a peer. Ximena and a male student were left simply observing Naomi and her friend.

Naomi exhibited a negative attitude in the third literature circle meeting. She sarcastically asked Humberto, “Did you read the story? Then you should know.” Upon joining her literature circle in week five, Naomi told the researcher, “I don’t like this group. It’s too much.” At that time, Naomi was visibly frustrated because her group was disorganized and asked her to participate under the pretense of two roles. During the final literature

circle meeting, Naomi refused to share her role sheet with her peers; instead, Ximena read Naomi's responses to the group. Naomi participated best in literature circles when she was in the leading role of Discussion Director yet even in this role, Naomi's participation was inconsistent. As Discussion Director in week four, Naomi was responsive to her group members. The researcher recorded in the observational notes, "Naomi is a better literature circle participant when she is in charge, but when she is with her friends she is easily distracted." Yet observational notes from week seven read, "Naomi's participation is dependent upon her mood/attitude. She likes to be in control and doesn't seem to enjoy receiving feedback from others. She is apathetic most times." The researcher and Mrs. Ian's views on Naomi's participation in literature circles conflict. In commenting on Naomi, Mrs. Ian shared,

As a student, I think that collaborative piece—participating with lots of different students—I think that made [Naomi] more open and willing to [participate in literature circles] mainly because I set up the expectation that they're expected to, but even now when I don't ask them to, they want to work together. And she's not always working with the same group of people all the time. I think it kind of helped her kind of stepped outside of that, and she just became aware that, you know, more than one other person [referring to Grace, Naomi's best friend] was in the room.

Based on observations, the researcher disagrees with Mrs. Ian's assertions that literature circle participation made Naomi a more cooperative and collaborative peer. The group dynamics of each literature circle had to be just right for Naomi to participate. If she was in a group with peers that she felt were less desirable, then Naomi vocalized her frustration. At the same time, if Naomi was in a group with her friends then she was likely to engage in off-task behavior and neglect participation. Although Naomi was a reluctant participant, Tomás was a willing and eager participant in literature circles when he was afforded the opportunity.

As previously mentioned, Tomás was typecast as a troublemaker in Mrs. Ian's classroom. During the focus group, for example, Will blamed Tomás for distracting him from preparing for his role (conveniently for Will, Tomás was not present for the focus group). Tomás would be isolated at times from his peers as a consequence for his misbehavior. Thus, Tomás was not given as many opportunities to participate in literature circles. To illustrate this point, the researcher noted that Tomás did not participate during weeks two, four, and six of literature circles. When Tomás was permitted to join his peers in literature circles, he was an active participant and seemed to greatly enjoy doing so. Tomás' enjoyment of literature circles was evident to the researcher. The researcher recorded the following in observational notes for week one,

Tomás was engaged during his literature circle meeting... Tomás does not get to work with his peers sometimes because he is in trouble. He seemed to enjoy meeting with his literature circle. Through Tomás' responses, he showed an understanding of the chapter and seemed to enjoy the book.

Similarly, Tomás was eager to respond to questions posed by the Discussion Director during the third (his second) literature circle meeting. Tomás had not prepared his role sheet prior to the fifth (his third) literature circle meeting. A peer responded by telling Tomás that he was not in the literature circle because he did not finish his role sheet. Tomás became defensive and quickly responded, "That's a big lie." Nevertheless, Tomás was again an eager participant in his literature circle. In week five's observational notes, the researcher wrote, "[Tomás] seems to enjoy peer interaction when he's given the opportunity." For a reason unbeknownst to the researcher, Tomás did not participate in the sixth round of literature circles. That week, Tomás asked Mrs. Ian if he could be in a literature circle with her but she declined. Observation notes from the final meeting of literature circles revealed, "Tomás was playing shy in that he did not want to read his

questions. He continued to work diligently in preparing for the meeting even while his group members discussed, which demonstrated his eagerness to participate.” In commenting on Tomás, Mrs. Ian stated, “[I]n some groups [Tomás] participated fine, and he actually had a lot of good things to add.” The researcher argues that each time that Tomás was permitted to participate in a literature circle, he was an active and willing participant. As Tomás was frequently isolated from his peers, the researcher argues that in terms of group dynamics, Tomás may have benefitted from literature circle participation the most.

Throughout the researcher’s observations of Will—both in and out of literature circles—he seemingly wanted to project a cavalier attitude towards schoolwork in front of his peers. During the first meeting, Will, who was assigned the role of Word Wizard, insisted that he could not find any interesting words in the text, which prompted a peer to remark, “You really don’t care, do you, Will?” Later in the meeting, the Discussion Director posed a question regarding emotions that were felt while reading the text. In response, Will remarked that he felt bored because he doesn’t like to read. In preparation for the second literature circle, Will wrote, “IDK” (an acronym for “I don’t know”) on his role sheet. Will participated in his literature circle while the researcher observed it. Upon the researcher’s leaving his literature circle, Will began to distract his group members by goofing around and making them laugh. During the third week of literature circles, the researcher overheard Will telling Mrs. Ian, “But I hate reading.” Similarly, in week four, the Discussion Director posed a question regarding the students’ least favorite parts of the book. Will retorted, “Reading. Because I hate reading.” Throughout this literature circle meeting, Will continually answered “I hate reading,” regardless of the question posed.

However, Will's attitude towards both literature circle participation and reading seemingly changed halfway through literature circles. Will was assigned to the leading role of Discussion Director in week five, and the researcher did not overhear Will express his hatred of reading. As the Discussion Director, Will chose thought-provoking questions to pose to his literature circle. Will's answers to his own questions demonstrated his depth of thinking of the text, which suggest to the researcher that perhaps Will benefitted from knowing the questions ahead of time. The dynamic between Will and Naomi was especially interesting. Observational notes written by the researcher read, "[Will] demanded [through persistence] that each member answer each question posed. He was especially persistent with Naomi, who was a reluctant participant." In the sixth week of literature circles, Will was assigned to a smaller group consisting of Nathan (non-participant) and a female student. However, Will quickly made the decision to kick the female student out of the group. When questioned by the researcher, Will stated, "She's loud and annoying." Will openly shared his disregard for some of his classmates including not only the female student whom he uninvited from his literature circle but also Humberto. As mentioned previously, Will repeatedly implied during the focus group session that he tries to avoid working in a small group with Humberto. Mrs. Ian assigned Tomás and Nathan to Will's literature circle in week seven. Since Tomás was working diligently to finish his role sheet, Will and Nathan primarily met. The researcher's observation notes from week seven read,

I did not hear Will state he hates reading today. He responded to each of Nathan's questions and was an active participant. He clearly is staying present in the text (through his answers). His participation has improved from the initial literature circle meetings, and he seems to do well in a smaller group (or partnership).

Will and Nathan were again paired for the eighth and final literature circle meeting; Will was an active participant once again. In commenting on Will's literature circle participation, Mrs. Ian remarked,

[Will] was really putting forth an effort to get it done, especially when I gave him one person. I said, 'Okay, I'm giving you one person,' and I think he really enjoyed just having that deep discussion with just one person [Nathan] and so I think that helped a lot instead of him having to speak in front of four or five other people.

The researcher agrees with Mrs. Ian's assertions. Will participated best in literature circles when he worked with one other person, Nathan. Participating in a close-knit literature circle seemed to afford Will the freedom to truly express himself, and he did not have to expend energy trying to keep up a façade in front of his peers. Although Will benefitted from Mrs. Ian's purposeful regrouping from week-to-week, the evolving social construction of literature circles had a primarily negative impact on Ximena.

For much of her time in literature circles, Ximena's participation was somewhat limited by her peers and her own more reserved personality. During the second literature circle meeting, Ximena seemed shy yet eager to participate. The researcher's observation notes read, "[Ximena] probably would have contributed more if she were not in a group with Naomi and two other girls who were playing around." In week three, Ximena frequently responded "I don't know..." to the Discussion Director's questions despite the Discussion Director's multiple attempts to solicit an answer from her. Ximena was very reserved and copied Grace's answers when she did respond. Ximena participated best when her peers respected her need for time to formulate her answers and in the latter half of literature circles. Ximena's fellow literature circle meetings in week four gave her time to formulate responses to the discussion questions and did not try to feed her answers as Grace did the week before. Ximena was assigned the role of Discussion Director for

week six. Although she was absent the previous day, she seemed to embrace the role and was more prepared. Observation notes from the sixth literature circle meeting read,

[Ximena] did not mimic her peers' answers but provided her own responses to the questions that she chose. (Perhaps Ximena benefits from knowing the questions beforehand so that she has time to think of her answers and is not "put on the spot.")

In the final week of literature circles, Ximena seemed to take on more of a leadership role although she was not assigned the role of Discussion Director. Ximena read the role sheets of both Naomi and two other female peers who were reluctant to participate in their literature circle. The researcher did not observe Ximena mimicking any of her peers' responses. Ximena's confidence as a literature circle participant seemingly increased over time. In describing Ximena's participation in literature circles, Mrs. Ian remarked,

I think after a while [Ximena] was very—she was excited and so even she would say, 'No, Mrs. Ian, I've had this role before.' And so she kind of wanted to explore the different roles and she really—I think that helped build her confidence because she knew, 'Oh, well, I haven't done this one, but I know I have things to help me participate.' So it helped.

In the previous comments, Mrs. Ian remarked that she noticed Ximena's eagerness to participate in literature circles increased over time. The researcher agrees with Mrs. Ian's assertion that Ximena's confidence as a literature circle participant increased over the eight weeks, and Ximena emerged as a leader in the last few literature circle meetings.

The researcher appreciated Mrs. Ian's heterogenous grouping of each literature circle yet planned for the membership of each literature circle to remain static throughout the eight weeks. For some participants, the ever-changing group composition of literature circles proved beneficial. Grace, for instance, learned to relinquish control and become a more cooperative peer who helped to facilitate her peers' learning. Will benefitted from Mrs. Ian's decision to place him in a smaller literature circle. Within the context of

working with a trusted peer, Will was able to drop the façade of his nonchalant attitude and began to participate and truly express his perspective of the text. For other participants, however, the changing group dynamics perhaps limited the potential benefits of literature circles.

The researcher argues that both Humberto and Lucita would have benefitted more so from a static literature circle. Humberto took each of his roles seriously and was eager to participate in each literature circles; however, at times, more dominant peers precluded his participation. In the initial interview, Humberto expressed that he enjoyed reading in a small group, which would suggest that Humberto would seemingly enjoy literature circles. However, Humberto did not echo this sentiment in the post-interview. The researcher argues that Humberto would have benefitted more from a static literature circle consisting of more respectful peers. Lucita was often overshadowed by her older peers who blatantly ignored her at times. Again, the researcher argues that Lucita would have benefitted from static literature circle membership. Over time, Lucita would have learned how to function in a literature circle and become more confident in her ability to express herself as Ximena did. Ximena seemed to overcome the evolving social composition of literature circles. Initially, Ximena was reserved and did not yet know how to participate in literature circles. Over time, and with the help of peers who respected her individuality, Ximena began to express her own unique thoughts on the text and even emerged as a leader in the latter groups.

The influence of group dynamics on a student's participation in literature circles is not unique to this study. Day et al. (2002) stated that one barrier to a student's participation in literature circles is that group membership may be unsupportive of his or

her growth. The sixth-grade students in a study conducted by Clarke & Holwadel (2007) had two prior years of experience with literature circles yet their participation had become dysfunctional. Clarke & Holwadel (2007) wrote,

[S]tudents really struggle[ed] with maintain[ing] a positive discursive environment. For example, many of their language practices dominated discussion groups such as giving orders, using insults, and disagreeing. They also participated in many more examples of sidetracking and off-task behavior that disrupted the flow of the discussion. The boys, in particular, sidetracked the most (p. 23).

The dysfunctional literature circles in Clarke & Howladel's (2007) study were primarily due to underlying sociocultural tensions. To help alleviate these tensions and facilitate more focused and productive literature circles, Clarke & Howladel integrated several mini-lessons to help each literature circle form a community, learn attentive listening, and take turns voicing their opinions. Such mini-lessons may have benefitted the students in this study and mitigated some of the negative effects of fluid group membership. Nevertheless, the researcher argues that the fluidity of literature circle membership diminished the opportunity for student voice to emerge during literature circle participation as well as resulted in group dynamics having a more pronounced effect on the literature circle participation of several of the cases in this study.

The evolving group dynamics of the literature circles observed for this study certainly influenced the participation of several cases. However, other implications also emerged from the results and findings of this study as the researcher discusses below.

The role of the text in literature circles. The researcher argues that the decision to have all students read *Rules* diminished the potential literature circle experience as

students did not have the opportunity to share their unique thoughts and perspectives on a relatively unknown text.

Clarke & Holwadel (2007) argued that to facilitate literature circles, teachers should “make a concerted effort to pick books that not only relate to the students’ lives and interests but also facilitate meaty discussions” (p. 26). *Rules* centered on the life of a pre-teen whose brother had Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Although *Rules* certainly had value in helping the reader to empathize with individuals with disabilities, the researcher would have liked for the students to read books that were more relevant to other marginalized students such as those featuring racial/ethnic minorities and/or students from impoverished backgrounds. In the second interview, following literature circle participation, the researcher asked each case if he or she could relate to *Rules*. Grace responded, “Only in one way...in that I’m a girl and Catherine’s [main character] a girl and that I have a brother and Catherine has a brother.” In the post-interviews, each of the seven cases expressed to the researcher that he or she would have preferred to read a different book from *Rules*.

In addition to the formulaic questions (discussed below), the chosen book may have also limited the depth of students’ conversations. Daniels (2002) cited poor book choice as one of the possible causes for dysfunctional literature circles. Long & Grove (2003) asserted that teachers should purposefully choose the texts to be discussed in literature circles so as to enable students to make connections between the text and their prior knowledge and experiences. Clarke & Holwadel (2007) added, “[S]ometimes the key to powerful discussions is to match the right book with the right group of readers” (p. 26). Furthermore, it is important for a text to be relevant to the lives of its readers.

Ma'ayan (2010) asserted that contemporary realistic fiction can help marginalized students connect to literacy and combat disengagement. For all students, realistic fiction is appealing because the reader is more likely to find a character with whom he or she can identify (Koss, 2009). Honig, Diamond, Gutlohn (2013) asserted that the ability to connect to the text can “enable students to understand, feel, value, and retain the depth of an author’s meaning” (p. 640). In addition to the selected text, Mrs. Ian herself also arguably influenced the results and findings as well as implications that emerged from this study.

The classroom’s teachers influence on literature circles. Over the course of this study, Mrs. Ian exhibited greater control over literature circles than the researcher planned. As discussed in Chapter Four, students who functioned as Discussion Directors were not allowed by Mrs. Ian to formulate their own discussion questions. In typical literature circles, the role of the Discussion Director is seminal as the student in this role is charged with writing questions for his or her literature circle to discuss and moving the conversation forward. However, Mrs. Ian required the Discussion Directors to choose questions from what the participants referred to as her question box to pose for discussion. Such questions were generic. The following are some examples of these questions: Do you think this book was well written? Why, or why not?; What are six adjectives that describe this book? What letter grade (A-F) would you give your book, and why? Unfortunately, these formulaic questions did not allow students to discuss the content of the book.

Literature circle expert Daniels (2002) stated that one of the possible causes of dysfunctional literature circles is what he terms *regular reading residue*, which refers to

lower-level questions being posed for discussion because of too much “drill and kill.” As opposed to providing formulaic questions for her students, Mrs. Ian could have provided them with questions stems to focus their conversations more on the content of *Rules* itself. Mills & Jennings (2011) recommended the use of question stems such as: “I noticed..., I wondered..., I appreciated..., I felt..., I made a connection..., I learned..., I was surprised by...” (p. 596). Moreover, Almasi (1995) asserted that student-led discussion encourages higher-level thinking than teacher-led discussion. Yet Mrs. Ian did not allow her students to formulate their own discussion questions, which may have hindered their potential learning in that they could not as freely explore their own wonderings about the text.

The students did not show great trust in one another. As discussed in Chapter Four, each of the seven participants expressed comfort in sharing his or her feelings with Mrs. Ian. However, the participants expressed discomfort in sharing their feelings with their peers, which may have detracted from the depth of their conversations. Day et al. (2002) noted that one of the prerequisites for successful literature circles is that students are free to disagree with their peers in a relatively risk-free environment. Morrison (2008) wrote that a teacher may fear that chaos will arise when he or she integrates student voice and choice in the classroom and that this fear indicates a lack of trust in one’s students. The researcher asserts that the emergence of student voice was especially difficult when the participants in this study were uncomfortable sharing their perspectives with their peers.

Not all of the implications that emerged from the results and findings of this study can be characterized as negative or provide further insight into what happens when

literature circles go awry. In fact, the results and findings of this study are quite promising given the more teacher-controlled literature circles that the researcher observed.

The promise of literature circles despite heavy teacher-control. As discussed previously in this chapter, both the school and classroom context in this study was conducted were more teacher-centered than the researcher planned. Campus administrators as well as Mrs. Ian placed great emphasis on meeting state accountability standards via the annual STAAR battery of tests. Apart from literature circles, the English language arts and reading instruction observed by the researcher was largely teacher-centered and did not necessarily to engage students in reading authentic literature or provide students with an opportunity to exercise and hone their literacy skills. Despite the emphasis on test preparation and teacher-centered instruction, the inclusion of literature circles in Mrs. Ian's classroom produced promising results and findings.

First, literature circles appear to boost the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers. As previously discussed in Chapter Four, the scores of each case on the Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995)—designed to measure of reader self-efficacy for intermediate-grades students—increased from the pre- to post-test. The results and findings from this quantitative data are supported by extensive qualitative data, also discussed in Chapter Four. Teachers of students who hesitate to engage in reading-related activities (i.e. reluctant readers) and/or demonstrate low proficiency in literacy (i.e. struggling readers) could increase the reader self-efficacy of these students by adding literature circles to their repertoire. Aside from seemingly

improving reader self-efficacy, results and findings from this study suggest that literature circle participation facilitates the development of students' literacy.

Literature circles appear to facilitate the development of students' literacy knowledge and skills by engaging students with authentic literature. When asked about potential benefits of incorporating literature circles into the English language arts and reading classroom, Mrs. Ian responded,

I think there are a lot of benefits. One, it gives children an exposure to novels, which so much of what we read in class and even on our STAAR [State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness] test is very quick, short reads, and that's okay, and it has a time and place. But I think we need to teach them how to read a novel and how to see the scope of what the author's doing over time and that takes—that's more subtle...

The above quotation from Mrs. Ian denotes that literature circles provide an avenue for engaging students with authentic literature as opposed to short passages of text designed to facilitate students' success on the annual state standardized exam. Additionally, literature circles set an authentic purpose for reading such as preparing for text-based discussion. According to Schmoker (2006), one has an authentic purpose for reading when he or she reads to glean meaning as opposed to honing basic literacy skills such as decoding and fluency. Fountas & Pinnell (2017) lauded literature circles for building literacy by enhancing reading comprehension, forging connections between the text and world, and building a deeper, richer understanding of the text by hearing the perspective of others. Beyond increasing student awareness of varying perceptions, literature circles also involve cooperative learning.

Cooperative learning via literature circles. Another implication derived from this study is that literature circle participation fosters cooperative learning in addition to

further developing literacy. Cooperative learning is based in sociocultural theory, which was theorized by Vygotsky (1978). Sociocultural theory postulates that learning is a social process, which develops by interacting with others (Vygotsky, 1978). Proponents of cooperative learning suggest that children learn best by doing, taking ownership of their learning, and engaging in plentiful social interaction (Dewey, 1916; Rogers, 1969; Piaget, 1947). Daniels (2002) asserted that cooperative learning fosters “true inquiry in small-group work by designing higher-order, student-centered, open-ended activities” (p. 35). Several characteristics of literature circles involve cooperative learning including: student-initiated inquiry, student choice, student self-direction, interdependence, and peer interaction (Daniels, 2002).

Mrs. Ian expressed that one of the benefits of literature circles that she observed over the course of this study was the opportunity for cooperative learning. Mrs. Ian remarked,

I think it teaches them how to enjoy and how to talk. It's really great for collaboration. We want students to learn how to work together and give them a common goal to reach. They really start to enjoy that and then when you give them something different, now they've had their experience of literature circles to say, 'Oh, I remember when I worked well with this group.' And the groups, in this class especially—they changed and so they were very aware that they were going to work with lots of different people. And so I think it helps. I think it helps with the community-building. I think it helps with collaboration.

In addition to this study, existing literature suggests that dialogic inquiry, such as that fostered in literature circles, supports both academic and social learning (Jennings & Mills, 2009; Lindfors, 1999). Furthermore, research conducted by Sportsman et al. (2011) found that the social skills of all students improved following their participation in literature circles. In terms of fostering cooperative learning for traditionally marginalized students, Daniels (2002) wrote,

I find that literature circles are often the *answer*, not the problem, for kids who are disaffected, marginalized, or unsuccessful in school. This structure offers a chance to be active, to do something, to make choices, to interact with peers, to get some positive attention. While the transition to literature circles may be especially bumpy for kids on the margins, the final payoff is often greatest with them. (p. 226)

Though the apparent benefits of literature circle participation include increased reader self-efficacy, further development of literacy knowledge and skills, and social learning, literature circles require intentionality from the classroom teacher.

The time- and resource-intensive nature of literature circles. The final implication of this study is that while the potential benefits of literature circle participation are vast, incorporating literature circles requires great orchestration from the classroom teacher. Mrs. Ian spoke to the challenge of implementing literature circles in her classroom by saying,

[T]he biggest drawback would be, um, and I don't know if it's a drawback—well, it kind of is: it's just the preparation time [literature circles] takes. It does take some dedication, and it does take a plan and before you jump into it...[O]nce you kind of get into it, once the preparation's done, it makes things so much easier, but you just have to do a lot of front work, I believe. I don't think this is something that you can even jump into with—like I think every student could do literature circles, you would just have to do a lot of front work.

As Mrs. Ian suggested, incorporating literature circles into the English language arts and reading classroom can be time-consuming, particularly for the classroom teacher. The researcher acknowledges that the time commitment needed to successfully implement literature circles is weighty and may discourage some classroom teachers from incorporating this student-centered approach to literacy in their classrooms. However, the researcher argues that the potential academic and social benefits of literature circles for

not only reluctant and/or struggling students but also their peers mitigates the time commitment.

Teaching literature circles to students and teachers. The final implication of this study is the importance of teaching students how to successfully participate in literature circles as well as teachers how to successfully organize and manage productive literature circles in their classrooms. For classroom teachers, there are numerous books as well as articles in practitioner journals which detail how to implement literature circles. Similarly, teachers can attend professional development seminars offered online (i.e. webinars), at their regional education service center, or conferences held by professional organizations. The researcher also suggests that literacy methods courses in teacher education programs instruct pre-service teachers how to utilize literature circles and other student-centered approaches to literacy instruction.

Prior to implementing literature circles in the classroom, teachers can provide mini-lessons to their students to orient them to this more student-centered literacy instructional strategy. Daniels (2002) suggested procedural mini-lessons focused on the routines, norms, and procedures of literature circles that include a range of topics from active listening, constructive disagreement, and taking turns verbalizing their opinions. Daniels & Steineke (2004) suggested that a part of every class period be used to support literature circles. The results and findings of this study produced four themes along with several implications, yet this study was not without its limitations, which are revisited below.

Limitations

As typical for all research, there were several limitations to this study. First, the observed literature circles were more teacher-controlled than the researcher intended, which arguably effected two themes of this study's themes. Results and findings for the third subquestion were limited by the dynamic grouping of the literature circles in Mrs. Ian's classroom. As stated in Chapter Three, the researcher predicted that participants would offer the cooperative nature of literature circles, student choice, and self-management as characteristics of literature circle participation that they found to be beneficial, motivating, and/or enjoyable. Yet the class elected to read the same text, whereas the researcher would have preferred for each literature circle to read a different text. This decision subsequently mitigated the researcher's predicted pattern of student choice for the third subquestion. In addition, students serving in the leading role of Discussion Director were not permitted by Mrs. Ian, the classroom teacher, to create their own discussion questions but were instead required to choose questions from a selection pre-determined by Mrs. Ian. The researcher argues that this instance of teacher control also mitigated the predicted pattern of student self-management for the third subquestion.

In addition to influencing the results and findings of the third subquestion, teacher control impacted this study in another way. As discussed in Chapter Four, the class decision to read the same novel allowed Mrs. Ian to change the grouping of literature circles each week, which as previously mentioned, resulted in the emergence of the primary implication of this study: the influence of group dynamics on literature circle participation. While heavy teacher control influenced the results and findings of the third

subquestion and resulted in the emergence of a prevalent implication, the researcher herself influenced the results and findings for the fourth subquestion.

A second limitation of this study relates to the fourth subquestion and its related theme. As discussed in Chapter Four, the questions that the researcher posed to the participants did not truly encapsulate the essence of voice. Rather, in an effort to make questions of voice more kid-friendly, the researcher pared the questions down too much, which resulted in questions that captured the participants' comfort with express their feelings in Mrs. Ian's classroom as opposed to their comfort in vocalizing their thoughts and opinions. Three of the seven cases (i.e. Grace, Tomás, and Will) did not meet the researcher's predicted pattern for the fourth subquestion (i.e. literature circle participation would increase student voice) due to insufficient qualitative support. Again, the researcher's questioning may have arguably influenced the results and findings for these three cases for subquestion four. The final limitation relates to the qualitative nature of this embedded multiple case study.

A final limitation, typical of qualitative research, is that the study is not generalizable to the population at large. The nature of case study research involves participants who are bound by a unique context. In this study, participants were bound to Mrs. Ian's intermediate-grades classroom. Therefore, the results and findings that emerged from this study may not translate to other contexts. Additionally, this study relied upon criterion-based purposive sampling and a relatively small sample size, both of which limit generalizability. In Chapter Four, the researcher described propositional generalizations that emerged from cross-case data analysis, but again, these propositional

generalizations may be unique to this study. Despite the aforementioned limitations of this study, the researcher proposes that several recommendations stem from this study.

Recommendations and Future Research

Reflecting on this study as a whole and particularly the results and findings, the researcher identified several recommendations for future research as well as opportunities for further study.

Recommendations

In retrospect, the researcher would implement several changes given additional time to conduct this study. Due to time constraints, the researcher observed the cases for only one eight-week literature circle cycle. In hindsight, the researcher would have videotaped each literature circle to provide even more insight into the group dynamics of literature circles and student voice. Additionally, the results and findings of this study would be greatly enhanced by the collection of additional qualitative data over the course of the school year. For example, the researcher could have observed the cases as they participated in the initial round of literature circles. Yet, in the context of this study, those meetings served as a pilot round of literature circles. Similarly, the researcher could have observed subsequent rounds of literature circles that occurred after February 2017 to collect additional data. Extending the duration of this study would have also allowed the researcher to collect the scores of each case's State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) reading assessment for the previous (2015-2016) and current (2017-2018) school years. This would allow the researcher to explore whether literature circles had an influence on a quantitative measure of reading achievement (i.e. STAAR reading

assessment scores) through a pre-test, post-test comparison. Relatedly, the researcher could have made additional changes to enhance this study.

Expounding upon an aforementioned limitation of this study, the researcher could have made some changes to enhance student voice. As discussed in the limitations section of this chapter, the interview questions written by the researcher did not encapsulate the essence of voice but instead emphasized participants' comfort in expressing their feelings in Mrs. Ian's class. In retrospect, the researcher could have used alternative ways to elicit responses from the participants. For example, the researcher could have posed scenarios in conjunction with questions to elicit more detailed responses from the study participants. In retrospect, the researcher would have piloted these questions prior to utilizing them for data collection. Additionally, the researcher would have insisted to Mrs. Ian that literature circle membership remain static throughout the eight weeks. This may have facilitated the emergence of student voice as participants would have arguably learned to assert themselves socially and become more comfortable in expressing their thoughts and feelings to more constant peers over time. Finally, the researcher has recommendations for English language arts and reading teachers.

As discussed in the implications section of this chapter, implementing literature circles requires a great deal of orchestration and time on the part of the classroom teacher. Nevertheless, the researcher argues that the time invested into literature circles is worthwhile. Several cases in this study commented on the time-intensive nature of literature circles. In the focus group, for instance, Ximena remarked that "[Literature circles] was sometimes taking up our time." Daniels (2002) wrote that literature circles require at least two to three hours a week for students to read the text, write (i.e. in

preparation for their respective roles), and meet with their peers. As Mrs. Ian remarked earlier in this chapter, preparation on the part of the teacher is critical to the success of literature circles and can be time-consuming. In leading professional development seminars on literature circles, the researcher has repeatedly received questions from in-service teachers regarding balancing the time-intensive literature circles with more typical English language arts and reading curriculum and preparation for state standardized tests. Admittedly, introducing literature circles to students inexperienced in participating in them and preparing them to meet independently can take upwards of 20 lessons (Day et al., 2002), not including time for the students to meet in their respective literature circles. Even so, the researcher argues that integrating literature circles into the English language arts and reading curriculum is a worthwhile investment. The results and findings from this study suggest that literature circle participation is beneficial in terms of boosting reader self-efficacy, facilitating students' development as readers, facilitating social learning, and motivating and engaging students with authentic literature. As a result, the promising results and findings from this study have inspired the researcher to continue studying the influence of literature circles on students.

Future Research

The promising results and findings from this study have led the researcher to plan to conduct more research into literature circles. In particular, the researcher is curious as to the potential influence that literature circles may have on discipline-specific literacy. Literacy is not limited to English language arts and reading classrooms but is a prerequisite for academic success, especially as students progress through school. Furthermore, content area teachers (i.e. mathematics, social studies, and science) must be

intentional in teaching students how to successfully read and glean from discipline-specific text. Recent research in adolescent literacy has shown that students who were typecast as struggling readers can be successful in other content areas when their content area teachers are intentional about encouraging discipline-specific reading and thinking (Learned, 2016). Relatedly, the researcher would like to study the influence of literature circle participation upon both students' discipline-specific literacy as well as content-area knowledge in a content area classroom.

In the implications section of this chapter, the researcher wrote of the importance of providing professional development to teachers who are interested in implementing literature circles in their classrooms. In the future, the researcher plans to examine the relationship between the type (i.e. hands-on workshop versus lecture) of professional development regarding literature circles received and a teacher's level of comfort with implementing literature circles as well as the outcomes of doing so on their students' literacy development.

Similarly, the researcher plans to further explore literature circles through the lens of quantitative research. For example, the researcher plans to administer the Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995) as a pre- and post-test to two demographically similar classrooms. One classroom will serve as the control group and will not participate in literature circles while the other classroom will serve as the experimental group and participate in literature circles. This proposed study will provide further insight into the influence that literature circle participation has on the reader self-efficacy of different demographics of readers.

As previously mentioned, *Rules* featured the relationship between a pre-teen and her brother with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). A couple of cases in this study made light of the unique dynamics between a person with a disability and his or her loved ones. Tomás wrote on his first role sheet, for example, “Atizam [autism] is hard to live with” on his role sheet. Previous research conducted by Adomat (2014) suggested that by reading about characters with disabilities, children can begin to better understand and interact with persons with disabilities in their daily lives. The researcher noted that members of one literature circle demonstrated inclusivity when a peer with a learning disability joined them for the final meeting. While this observation aligns with Adomat’s (2014) assertion, this was an isolated incident in that the peer with a learning disability did not participate in previous literature circle meetings. Previous research (Adomat, 2014; Anderson & Corbett, 2008; Blum et al., 2002; Goatley et al., 1995; Eeds & Wells, 1989) studied the influence of literature circle participation upon students with learning disabilities. Yet future research may more closely examine the dynamic between students with learning disabilities and their typical peers following literature circle meetings focused on texts that feature characters with disabilities.

The researcher also plans to study the influence of literature circles on student voice, particularly that of racial and ethnic minorities. The researcher intended for this study to lend itself to further exploration of this issues; however, as mentioned previously, the results and findings of this study did not lend themselves to further exploring this topic. Future research on literature circles conducted by the researcher will build upon the results and findings of this study, on which the researcher offers concluding remarks below.

This study contributes to existing scholarly research on literature circles. Numerous studies proclaim the benefits of literature circle participation upon students' literacy and cooperative learning skills. This study is unique in that it denotes the positive influence of literature circle participation upon the reader self-efficacy of reluctant and/or struggling readers. The implications of this study likewise contribute to a gap in the current literature by providing further insight into what results when student ownership and peer interaction in literature circles are limited.

Concluding Remarks

Literature circles can provide an avenue for a more student-centered approach to English language arts and reading instruction. The results and findings from this study provide evidence of the benefits of literature circle participation in terms of both literacy and cooperative learning for reluctant and/or struggling readers. Participating in a literature circle has been shown to be both motivating and enjoyable for students across grade levels as well. The flexible nature of literature circles allows not only English language arts and reading teachers but also content area teachers to adapt and incorporate literature circles into their classrooms. In an era of high-stakes accountability and test-focused instruction, the inclusion of literature circles in the English language arts and reading curriculum is important now more than ever.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Letter to Parent/Guardian for Consent for Research



Dear Parent(s) and/or Guardian(s),

My name is Elena Venegas, and I am currently pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Curriculum and Teaching at Baylor University. I am writing today to obtain your consent for your child to participate in my dissertation research, which will be conducted in Mrs. [REDACTED]'s classroom at [REDACTED] School. More information may be found below.

What is the purpose of this study, and why is my child being asked to participate?

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of literature circles, or book clubs, upon reluctant and/or struggling readers. Your child is being asked to participate in this study because he or she does not enjoy reading. Previous research studies have found that children are motivated to read by literature circles. This study is unique in that it seeks to explore the influence of literature circles upon self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a term for one's feelings that he or she can accomplish a task, in this case, reading.

What will my child be asked to do as a study participant, and will my child be singled out?

All of the students in Mrs. [REDACTED]'s class will participate in a literature circle and complete a role sheet in preparation for his or her literature circle meetings. Your child will be asked to meet with me, the Principal Investigator of this study, for two interviews and a focus group session. Your child will not be singled out because all of the students in Mrs. [REDACTED]'s class will participate in a literature circle. If asked by other children in the class, myself or Mrs. [REDACTED] will inform them that your child was randomly selected for the focus group and interviews.

Are there any risks to my child for participating in this study, and can I withdraw my consent?

Participating in this study will not hurt your child. During the interview and/or focus group your child may become tired or upset. Your child is free to take a break or stop the interview/focus group at any time. Your child will be provided a pseudonym as will Mrs. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] School in order to maintain confidentiality. You can withdraw your consent at any time during the study—even after data collection has finished. Your child can likewise withdraw his or her consent at any time without penalty.

How do I give my consent?

Please read the attached Parent/Guardian Permission Form for Research. Your child must also consent to participating in this study. Please read the attached Assent Form for Research with your child. Return the Parent/Guardian Permission Form for Research (signed by you) and the Assent Form for Research (signed by your child) to Mrs. [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me via email at Elena_Venegas@baylor.edu. Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Elena Venegas, MEd.
Ph.D. Candidate

APPENDIX B

Parent/Guardian Consent Form for Research

Baylor University
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Parent/Guardian Permission Form for Research

PROTOCOL TITLE: The influence of literature circles upon the self-efficacy of reluctant and struggling readers

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Elena Venegas, MEd.

SUPPORTED BY: Baylor University

Some or all of the people who are eligible to take part in this study may not be able to give consent because they are less than 18 years of age (a minor). Instead we will ask their parent(s) or guardian to give permission for them to take part in the study. We will ask the minor to agree (give their assent) to take part in a separate form.

Introduction

Please read this form carefully. The purpose of this form is to provide you with important information about the research study and what to expect if you allow your child to participate. If any of the statements or words in this form are unclear, please let us know. We would be happy to answer any questions. You have the right to discuss this study with another person who is not part of the research team before making your decision whether or not your child can be in the study.

Your child's participation is voluntary. If you decide to let your child take part in this research study, we will ask you to sign this form. We will ask your child to read and sign an assent form if he or she is old enough to understand. Your child can refuse to take part even if you provide permission. We will give you a copy of the signed forms.

The person in charge of this study is Elena Venegas, MEd. As Elena Venegas is a doctoral candidate (student), the faculty advisor and supervisor of this study is Dr. Gretchen Schwarz. We will refer to Elena Venegas as the "researcher" throughout this form.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of literature circles upon the self-efficacy of reluctant and struggling readers. A literature circle is a small, structured book club. Self-efficacy refers to one's feelings that he or she can accomplish a particular task. A reluctant reader is someone who reads proficiently but does not like to read. A struggling reader is someone who has difficulty reading and therefore may or may not like reading. Since literature circles are student-centered and student-managed, the researcher is interested in exploring the influence that literature circles have upon the self-efficacy of reluctant and struggling readers.

We are asking your child to take part in this study because he or she has been identified as a reluctant or struggling reader by his or her classroom teacher under the guidance of the researcher.

About 5-10 subjects will take part in this research study at Lake Air Montessori Magnet School.

How long will my child take part in this research study?

We expect that your child will be in this research study for approximately 15 weeks (i.e. August-December 2016). During this time, the researcher will make approximately 9 study visits to Mrs. Tara Vaughn's classroom at Lake Air Montessori Magnet School.

What will happen if my child takes part in this research study?

If you agree to allow your child to take part in this study, we will ask you to sign the permission form before we do any study procedures.

This study is identified as having a "Minimal Risk" and poses no known physical or psychological risk. As the researcher is an adult with whom your child has previously had little to no previous interaction, your child may experience mild discomfort in talking to the researcher initially. If your child shares his or her discomfort with the classroom teacher and/or the researcher, he or she will be able to discontinue his or her participation in the study with no penalty or consequence.

All collected information will be securely kept, and pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of your child. At the conclusion of this study, all information collected will be destroyed for privacy purposes. Demographic and geographic information will be mentioned in the study; however, your child's name and the names of his or her school and classroom teacher will be kept anonymous in the study and any publications. An analysis of the study will be written upon completion of the research and will be available for review.

The researcher is interested in exploring the influence of literature circles upon the self-efficacy of reluctant or struggling readers. Therefore, the following data will be collected for the purpose of this study:

State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) reading score: The researcher will ask for your child's score on the reading portion of the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) examination that your child took during the 2015-2016 school year. This will help the researcher in describing your child as a reader.

Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS): The Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) is an instrument developed to assess how children feel about themselves as readers. The RSPS was designed particularly for use with children in the intermediate grades (i.e. fourth, fifth, and sixth grades.) The RSPS consists of 33 items designed to assess a child's self-perceptions along four dimensions of self-efficacy, which are:

1. progress (i.e. how he or she has progressed as a reader over time)
2. observational comparison (i.e. how one feels about his or herself as a reader in compared to his or her peers)
3. social feedback (i.e. how one's teacher, family, and peers describe him or her as a reader), and
4. physiological states (i.e. how one feels physically while reading).

Children are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with a statement on a 5-point scale (5 = Strongly Agree, 1 = Strongly Disagree). The RSPS was written so that children may take the assessment on their own; however, an adult (i.e. classroom teacher, paraprofessional, volunteer, or the researcher) may help, if needed. The researcher will score each child's RSPS and will share the results with the classroom teacher. Your child will be given the RSPS twice over the course of this study. The researcher anticipates that the RSPS will first be administered in August or September 2016 as a pre-test. The anticipated administration of the RSPS post-test is November or December 2016.

Interviews: The researcher will conduct two individual interviews with your child. Each interview will last approximately 10-30 minutes. Your child's responses will be audio recorded, and the researcher will take reflective notes during and after the interview. The anticipated timeline for the first individual interview is September 2016 while the anticipated timeline for the second individual interview is December 2016. There are no foreseeable risks to this study. Your child will be free to disclose any and all information about his or her lived experiences with particular relation to reading and participation in literature circles.

Classroom observations: While your child is participating in a literature circle, the researcher and your child's classroom teacher will each write reflective notes concerning his or her participation in the group and interaction with his or her peers. After these reflective notes have been taken, the researcher and your child's classroom teacher will work together to analyze prevalent themes from the classroom observations.

Documentation: As part of participating in a literature circle, each student will be required to complete a role sheet, which helps him or her prepare for the literature circle discussion. The researcher will collect the role sheets that your child prepared for each literature circle meeting as a form of documentation. The researcher will read through your child's role sheets in order to analyze his or her level of participation in the literature circle and growth, if any, as a reader.

Focus group: A focus group will be conducted with all of the children (approximately 5-10) who are participating in this study. The focus group will last approximately 30-60 minutes. Your child's responses will be audio recorded, and the researcher will take reflective notes during and after the focus group. The anticipated timeline for the focus group is December 2016. There are no foreseeable risks to this study. Your child will be free to disclose any and all information about his or her lived experiences with particular relation to reading and participation in literature circles.

The following outlines the procedures and/or activities that your child will be asked to perform and/or do at each study visit:

Study Visit 1

Visit 1 will take about 30-45 minutes to complete. At this visit, we will ask your child to do the following:

- complete the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) pre-test independently.

Study Visit 2

Visit 2 will take about 10-30 minutes to complete. At this visit, we will ask your child to do the following:

- participate in an individual interview with the researcher. During the interview, the researcher will ask questions regarding your child's perception of his or herself as a reader both in general and based upon his or her responses to the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) pre-test.

Study Visit 3

Visit 3 will take about 30-60 minutes to complete. At this visit, we will ask your child to do the following:

- participate in a group meeting of his or her assigned literature circle. During the literature circle meeting, the researcher will observe your child. The researcher will collect the role sheet that your child prepared for his or her literature circle discussion as documentation.

Study Visit 4

Visit 4 will take about 30-60 minutes to complete. At this visit, we will ask your child to do the following:

- participate in a group meeting of his or her assigned literature circle. During the literature circle meeting, the researcher will observe your child. The researcher will collect the role sheet that your child prepared for his or her literature circle discussion as documentation.

Study Visit 5

Visit 5 will take about 30-60 minutes to complete. At this visit, we will ask your child to do the following:

- participate in a group meeting of his or her assigned literature circle. During the literature circle meeting, the researcher will observe your child. The researcher will collect the role sheet that your child prepared for his or her literature circle discussion as documentation.

Study Visit 6

Visit 6 will take about 30-60 minutes to complete. At this visit, we will ask your child to do the following:

- participate in a group meeting of his or her assigned literature circle. During the literature circle meeting, the researcher will observe your child. The researcher will collect the role sheet that your child prepared for his or her literature circle discussion as documentation.

Study Visit 7

Visit 7 will take about 30-45 minutes to complete. At this visit, we will ask your child to do the following:

- complete the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) post-test independently.

Study Visit 8

Visit 8 will take about 30-60 minutes to complete. At this visit, we will ask your child to do the following:

- participate in a focus group with the other children who are participating in this research study. During the focus group, the researcher will ask the children questions about their literature circle experience as well as how they feel about reading following their participation in a literature circle.

Study Visit 9

Visit 9 will take about 10-30 minutes to complete. At this visit, we will ask your child to do the following:

- participate in an individual interview with the researcher. During the interview, the researcher will ask questions regarding your child's perception of his or

herself as a reader both in general and based upon his or her responses to the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) post-test.

Audio/Video Recording

We would like make an audio recording of your child during this study. If your child is recorded it will be possible to identify him/her on the recording. We will store these recordings in a locked cabinet and only approved study staff will be able to access them. We will label these recordings with a pseudonym instead of your child's name. The recordings will be stored until August 2017 and will be destroyed after that time.

Audio recording is required for this study. If you do not want your child to be recorded, he/she should not be in this study.

What are the risks of taking part in this research study?

No foreseeable risks: To the best of our knowledge, taking part in this study will not hurt your child.

Risks of Completing Tasks

Your child may get tired during the tasks. Your child can rest at any time.

Interviews

Your child may feel emotional and/or upset when answering some of the questions. He or she can tell the interviewer at any time if he or she wants to take a break or stop the interview.

Focus Groups

The researcher will ask your child and the other people in the group to use only **first names/pseudonyms** during the group session. The researcher will also ask your child not to tell anyone outside the group what any particular person said in the group. However, the researcher cannot guarantee that everyone will keep the discussions private.

Loss of Confidentiality

A risk of taking part in this study is the possibility of a loss of confidentiality. Loss of confidentiality includes having your child's personal information shared with someone who is not on the study team and was not supposed to see or know about your information. The researcher plans to protect your confidentiality. The researcher's plans for keeping your child's information private are described later in this consent form.

Are there any benefits from being in this research study?

Your child may or may not benefit from taking part in this study. Possible benefits to your child of participating in this study include uncovering his or her growth as a reader, an increase in feeling like a valuable member of his or classroom community, and more

positively perceiving his or herself as a reader. Additionally, others may benefit in the future from the information that is learned in this study.

What alternatives are available?

You may choose not to allow your child to take part in this research study. Your child does not have to take part in this research study to receive course credit.

Storing Study Information for Future Use

We would like to store your child's study information for future research related to literature circles. We will label all your child's study information with a pseudonym instead of his or her name. All data related to your child will be kept in a password-protected computer and/or locked file.

Future use of study information is optional for this study. If you do not want your child's information to be used for future research, your child can still be in the study. You will indicate your decision at the end of this form.

How Will You Keep My Child's Study Records Confidential?

We will keep the records of this study confidential by using a pseudonym for your child and storing all data in a password-protected computer and/or locked file. We will make every effort to keep your child's records confidential. However, there are times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of your child's records.

Reporting child abuse: If, during your participation in this study, we have reasonable cause to believe that child abuse is occurring, this will be reported to authorities as required by law. The researcher will make every reasonable effort to protect the confidentiality of your child's research information. However, it might be possible that a civil or criminal court will demand the release of identifiable research information.

Reporting risk of harm to self or others: If, during your child's participation in this study, we have reason to believe that your child is at risk for harming himself or herself or others, we are required to take the necessary actions. This may include notifying your child's doctor, your child's therapist, or other individuals. If this were to occur, we would not be able to assure confidentiality.

The following people or groups may review your child's study records for purposes such as quality control or safety:

- The Researcher and any member of **her** research team
- Authorized members of Baylor University who may need to see your child's information, such as administrative staff members from the Office of the Vice Provost for Research and members of the Institutional Review Board (a committee which is responsible for the ethical oversight of the study)

The study data will be stored in a password-protected computer and/or locked file within the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Baylor University.

The results of this study may also be used for teaching, publications, or presentations at professional meetings. If your child's individual results are discussed, your child's identity will be protected by using a pseudonym rather than his or her name or other identifying information.

Study Participation and Early Withdrawal

Allowing your child to take part in this study is your choice. You are free not to allow your child to take part or to withdraw your child at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you or your child are entitled. If you decide to withdraw your child from this study, the information that your child has already provided will be kept confidential. You cannot withdraw information collected prior to your child's withdrawal.

Your child may choose not to be in the study or to stop being in the study before it is over at any time. This will not affect your child's class standing or your child's grades at Lake Air Montessori Magnet School. Your child will not be offered or receive any special consideration if he or she takes part in this research study.

Will my child get paid for taking part in this research study?

You or your child will not be paid for taking part in this study.

What will it cost me to take part in this research study?

There are no costs to you or your child for taking part in this research study.

What if I have any questions or concerns about this research study?

You can call us with any concerns or questions about the research. Our contact information is listed below:

The Researcher:

Elena Venegas, MEd.

Doctoral Candidate, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Baylor University

Office: (254) 710-6790

Email: Elena_Venegas@baylor.edu

Faculty Advisor:

Dr. Gretchen Schwarz

Professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Baylor University

Office: (254) 710-6121

Witness to Permission of Parent(s)/Guardians Who Cannot Read or Write or are Physically Unable to Talk or Write

Statement of Witness

I represent that the permission form was presented orally to the parent(s)/guardian in his or her own language, that the parent(s)/guardian was given the opportunity to ask questions, and that the parent(s)/guardian has indicated his or her consent for his or her child's participation by (check one box as applicable):

Making his/her mark above

Other means _____
(fill in above)

Signature of Witness

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Parent(s)/Guardian Permission:

I have explained the research to the parent(s)/guardian and answered all his/her questions. I will give a copy of the signed permission form to the parent(s)/guardian.

Signature of Person Obtaining Permission

Date

APPENDIX C

Minor Assent Form for Research

Baylor University
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Assent Form for Research

PROTOCOL TITLE: The influence of literature circles upon the self-efficacy of reluctant and struggling readers

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Elena Venegas, MEd.

SUPPORTED BY: Baylor University

What is a Research Study?

We want to tell you about a research study we are doing. Research studies help us to learn new things and test new ideas. People who work on research studies are called researchers. During research studies, the researchers collect a lot of information so that they can learn more about something. We are doing this study because we would like to learn more about literature circles, which are small book clubs that occur in a classroom. We are asking you join this study because you usually do not like to read because you find it boring and/or hard.

There are a few things you should know about this study:

- You get to decide if you want to be in the study
- You can say ‘No’ or ‘Yes’
- Whatever you decide is OK
- If you say ‘Yes’ now, you can change your mind and say ‘No’ later
- No one will be upset if you say ‘No’
- You can ask us questions at any time
- We will also get permission from your parent/guardian for you to take part in this study

The person in charge of this study is Mrs. Elena Venegas. Mrs. Venegas is a doctoral candidate at Baylor University. The person supervising Mrs. Venegas is Dr. Gretchen Schwarz. Mrs. Venegas will be called the “researcher”.

What will I do if I am in this research study?

If you decide to be in this study, we will ask you to:

- Take the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) assessment twice
- Be interviewed by the researcher twice
- Be observed by the researcher while you meet with your literature circle approximately four times
- Participate in a focus group with the other students in your class who are participating in this study

During this study, we will ask you to come to participate in a literature circle and activities related to literature circle in Mrs. Vaughn's classroom at Lake Air Montessori Magnet School. You will see the researcher for approximately 9 study visits. This study will last approximately 15 weeks from August to December 2016.

Audio/Video Recording

We would like make an audio recording of you during this study. If you are recorded it will be possible to identify you on the recording. We will store these recordings in a locked cabinet and only the researchers will be able to see them. Audio recording is required for this study. If you do not want to be recorded, you should not be in this study.

Can anything bad happen to me while I am in this study?

We do not think that taking part in this study will hurt you. However, some of the topics to be discussed may make you uncomfortable. You can skip any questions you do not want to answer. You can also tell the researcher and/or your classroom teacher that you do not want to participate at any time. You may get tired during the tasks. You can rest at any time.

Will being in this research study help me?

Being in this study may help you by realizing your growth as a reader, feeling more like a valuable member of your classroom community, and more positively perceiving yourself as a reader.

We may learn something through this study that will help other children who do not like to read or reading hard someday. This study will help us to learn more about literature circles as well.

What else should I know?

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to.

It is also ok to say "yes" and change your mind later. You can stop being in the research at any time. If you want to stop, tell the researcher. No one will be mad at you.

What if I have any questions about this research study?

You can call us with any concerns or questions about the research. Our telephone numbers are listed below:

The Researcher:

Elena Venegas, MEd.
Doctoral Candidate, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Baylor University
Office: (254) 710-6790
Email: Elena_Venegas@baylor.edu

Faculty Advisor:

Dr. Gretchen Schwarz
Professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Baylor University
Office: (254) 710-6121
Email: Gretchen_Schwarz@baylor.edu

If you have other questions about the study and want to talk to someone who is not a part of the study, you can call the Baylor University IRB through the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at 254-710-1438.

Statement of Consent

If you want to be in the study, write your name below.

Signature of Subject

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Assent:

I have explained the research to the subject and answered all his or her questions. I will give a copy of the signed consent form to the subject and his or her parent and/or guardian.

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

APPENDIX D

Classroom Teacher Consent Form for Research

Baylor University
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Consent Form for Research

PROTOCOL TITLE: The influence of literature circles upon the self-efficacy of reluctant and struggling readers

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Elena Venegas, MEd.

SUPPORTED BY: Baylor University

Purpose of the research: The purpose of this study is to explore the influence of literature circles upon the self-efficacy of reluctant and struggling readers. We are asking you to take part in this study because you are an intermediate grades teacher.

Study activities: If you choose to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview with the researcher. During the interview, the researcher will ask questions regarding how you feel the reader self-efficacy of each study participant changed over the course of participating in a literature circle.

Risks and Benefits:

To the best of our knowledge, there are no risks to you for taking part in this study. During interviews, you may feel emotional or upset when answering some of the questions. Tell the interviewer at any time if you want to take a break or stop the interview.

You may or may not benefit from taking part in this study. Possible benefits include learning more about literature circles and their influence upon reluctant and/or struggling readers. Others may benefit in the future from the information that is learned in this study.

Confidentiality:

A risk of taking part in this study is the possibility of a loss of confidentiality. Loss of confidentiality includes having your personal information shared with someone who is

not on the study team and was not supposed to see or know about your information. The researcher plans to protect your confidentiality.

Compensation:

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

Questions or concerns about this research study

You can call us with any concerns or questions about the research. Our telephone numbers are listed below:

The Researcher:

Elena Venegas, MEd.

Doctoral Candidate, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Baylor University

Office: (254) 710-6790

Email: Elena_Venegas@baylor.edu

Faculty Advisor:

Dr. Gretchen Schwarz

Professor, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Baylor University

Office: (254) 710-6121

Email: Gretchen_Schwarz@baylor.edu

If you want to speak with someone not directly involved in this research study, you may contact the Baylor University IRB through the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at 254-710-1438. You can talk to them about:

- Your rights as a research subject
- Your concerns about the research
- A complaint about the research

Taking part in this study is your choice. You are free not to take part or to stop at any time for any reason. No matter what you decide, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit to which you are entitled. If you decide to withdraw from this study, the information that you have already provided will be kept confidential. Information already collected about you cannot be deleted.

By continuing with the research and completing the study activities, you are providing consent.

APPENDIX E

Campus Principal Approval for Research

[Redacted]



May 24, 2016

To the Baylor University Institutional Review Board,

I am aware of the research project titled "The influence of literature circles upon the self-efficacy of reluctant and struggling readers" that Elena Venegas has proposed and will permit her to conduct this research on our campus.

Sincerely,

[Redacted]

[Redacted] Principal, [Redacted]

APPENDIX F

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval



BAYLOR
UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD – PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN
RESEARCH

NOTICE OF EXEMPTION FROM IRB REVIEW

Principal Investigator: Elena Venegas
Study Title: The influence of literature circles upon the self-
efficacy of reluctant and struggling readers
IRB Reference #: 9
15993 Date of Determination: 0
7/11/2016
Exemption Category: 45 CFR 46.101(b)(1)

The above referenced human subjects research project has been determined to be EXEMPT from review by the Baylor University Institutional Review Board (IRB) according to federal regulation 45 CFR 46.101(b):

- (1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

The following documents were reviewed:

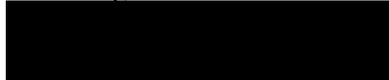
- IRB Application, submitted on 05/27/2016
- Protocol, dated 05/27/2016
- Teacher Consent Form, dated 07/11/2016
- Parental Permission Form, dated 05/27/2016
- Child Assent Form, dated 05/27/2016
- Letter of Support, submitted on 06/01/2016

- Interview and Focus Group protocols, submitted on 05/27/2016
- Circle Role Sheets, submitted on 05/27/2016
- Observation Checklist, submitted on 05/27/2016
- Reader Self-Perception Scale, submitted on 05/27/2016

This exemption is limited to the activities described in the submitted materials. If the research is modified, you must contact this office to determine whether your research is still eligible for exemption prior to implementing the modifications.

If you have any questions, please contact Deborah Holland at (254) 710-1438 or Deborah_L_Holland@baylor.edu.

Sincerely,



Deborah L. Holland, JD,
MPH Assistant Vice
Provost of Research
Director of Compliance

OFFICE OF THE VICE PROVOST FOR RESEARCH

One Bear Place #97310 • Waco, TX 76798-7310 • (254) 710-3708 • FAX (254) 710-7309 •
<http://www.baylor.edu/research/irb/>

**APPENDIX A (cont'd.)
The Reader Self-Perception Scale**

[PS]	21. I feel calm when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[OC]	22. I read more than other kids.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	23. I understand what I read better than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	24. I can figure out words better than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	25. I feel comfortable when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	26. I think reading is relaxing.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	27. I read better now than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	28. When I read, I recognize more words than I used to.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	29. Reading makes me feel good.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	30. Other kids think I'm a good reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	31. People in my family think I read pretty well.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	32. I enjoy reading.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	33. People in my family like to listen to me read.	SA	A	U	D	SD

The Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) 479

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APPENDIX B

The Reader Self-Perception Scale Directions for administration, scoring, and interpretation

The Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) is intended to provide an assessment of how children feel about themselves as readers. The scale consists of 33 items that assess self-perceptions along four dimensions of self-efficacy (Progress, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback, and Physiological States). Children are asked to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with each statement on a 5-point scale (5 = Strongly Agree, 1 = Strongly Disagree). The information gained from this scale can be used to devise ways to enhance children's self-esteem in reading and, ideally, to increase their motivation to read. The following directions explain specifically what you are to do.

Administration

For the results to be of any use, the children must: (a) understand exactly what they are to do, (b) have sufficient time to complete all items, and (c) respond honestly and thoughtfully. Briefly explain to the children that they are being asked to complete a questionnaire about reading. Emphasize that this is not a *test* and that there are no *right* answers. Tell them that they should be as honest as possible because their responses will be confidential. Ask the children to fill in their names, grade levels, and classrooms as appropriate. Read the directions aloud and work through the example with the students as a group. Discuss the response options and make sure that all children understand the rating scale before moving on. It is important that children know that they may raise their hands to ask questions about any words or ideas they do not understand.

The children should then read each item and circle their response for the item. They should work at their own pace. Remind the children that they should be sure to respond to all items. When all items are completed, the children should stop, put their pencils down, and wait for further instructions. Care should be taken that children who work more slowly are not disturbed by children who have already finished.

Scoring

To score the RSPS, enter the following point values for each response on the RSPS scoring sheet (Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Undecided = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1) for each item number under the appropriate scale. Sum each column to obtain a raw score for each of the four specific scales.

Interpretation

Each scale is interpreted in relation to its total possible score. For example, because the RSPS uses a 5-point scale and the Progress scale consists of 9 items, the highest total score for Progress is 45 ($9 \times 5 = 45$). Therefore, a score that would fall approximately in the middle of the range (22-23) would indicate a child's somewhat indifferent perception of her or himself as a reader with respect to Progress. Note that each scale has a different possible total raw score (Progress = 45, Observational Comparison = 30, Social Feedback = 45, and Physiological States = 40) and should be interpreted accordingly.

As a further aid to interpretation, Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics by grade level for each scale. The raw score of a group or individual can be compared to that of the pilot study group at each grade level.

APPENDIX C

The Reader Self-Perception Scale scoring sheet

Student name _____

Teacher _____

Grade _____ Date _____

Scoring key: 5 = Strongly Agree (SA)
 4 = Agree (A)
 3 = Undecided (U)
 2 = Disagree (D)
 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD)

Scales

General Perception	Progress	Observational Comparison	Social Feedback	Physiological States
1. _____	10. _____	4. _____	2. _____	5. _____
	13. _____	6. _____	3. _____	8. _____
	15. _____	11. _____	7. _____	16. _____
	18. _____	14. _____	9. _____	21. _____
	19. _____	20. _____	12. _____	25. _____
	23. _____	22. _____	17. _____	26. _____
	24. _____		30. _____	29. _____
	27. _____		31. _____	32. _____
	28. _____		33. _____	

Raw score _____ of 45 _____ of 30 _____ of 45 _____ of 40

Score interpretation				
High	44+	26+	38+	37+
Average	39	21	33	31
Low	34	16	27	25

APPENDIX D

Validation

A pool of initial items was developed that reflected each of Bandura's (1977) four factors (Performance, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback, and Physiological States). Thirty graduate students in reading were presented the pool of items in random order as well as the conceptual definitions for each of the four factor categories. The graduate students were asked to place each item in the category it seemed to fit best. Based upon feedback received in this judgmental process, modifications were made to the item pool.

The instrument was then administered to 625 students in grades four, five, and six in two different school districts. Preliminary alpha reliabilities for each scale measured in the mid 70's range. Although alpha reliabilities in this range are quite acceptable for an affective measure (Gable, 1986), the analysis identified some items that did not seem to fit well with the rest of the scale. In addition, an exploratory factor analysis indicated clear scales for Observational Comparison, Social Feedback and Physiological States, but not for the Performance scale. Since the items were not clustering as a single construct, the operational definition of the scale was reexamined. A panel of eight experts (consisting of both university faculty and graduate students enrolled in reading and affective instrument development courses) examined the data more closely and made recommendations. The panel concluded that it was more meaningful to use perceptions of personal progress as the one concrete way readers might be able to make ability judgments apart from the other scales. It was also felt that the progress construct subsumed the majority of the dimensions of the original Performance scale. Thus, the original scale was operationally redefined, and only those items that reflected personal progress were retained. For this reason, the scale was renamed Progress.

After the revisions indicated by the first pilot had been made, an additional 1,479 fourth, fifth and sixth grade children in several urban, suburban and rural school districts were asked to respond. Further reliability analyses indicated scale alphas ranging from .81 to .84 with all items contributing to the overall scale reliability. Table 1 (p. 473) displays the internal consistency reliabilities for each scale by grade level. A factor analysis indicated the existence of each of the expected categories and, as hoped, moderate yet significant relationships were indicated between RSPS scores (total and individual scale) and both the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (McKenna & Kear, 1990) and a variety of standardized reading achievement measures (Henk & Melnick, 1992, 1993).

Moreover, as Table 2 (p. 474) indicates, the mean scores and standard deviations for each scale were extremely similar across grades, and the corresponding standard errors were desirably low. Children reported the highest relative reader self-perceptions on the Progress scale (39.4 of the maximum possible 45) followed by Physiological States (31.2 of 40), Social Feedback (32.7 of 45), and Observational Comparison (20.9 of 30). Overall, these scores indicate that children tended to think of themselves as capable readers.

APPENDIX H

Student Interview #1 Protocol

1. Please tell me about yourself.
2. What is your favorite subject in school? What do you like about (favorite subject)?
3. What do you like to do when you're not in school?
4. Do you like to read? Why or why not?
5. Are there any activities that you would rather do instead of reading? If so, what are they?
6. Why do you read, when you do?
7. In your experience, what usually happens during reading and/or English/language arts (ELAR) instruction?
8. How would you describe yourself as a reader? Why did you describe yourself that way?
9. If you could choose any type of text to read, what would you choose?
10. You took a survey called the Reader Self-Perception Scale or RSPS. From your score on the RSPS, you seem to be (describe characteristic as indicated by the RSPS pre-test.) Why do you think your score indicated those characteristics?
11. Do you feel like you can openly share your feelings in class? Why or why not?
12. Do you feel like your voice is heard in Mrs. Ian's class and/or in school? Why or why not?
13. What is a literature circle or book club?
14. Have you ever been a part of a literature circle or book club?
 - a. If not, would you want to be in a literature circle or book club? Why or why not?
 - b. If so, when? How would you describe your experience in that literature circle or book club?
15. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about yourself as a reader?

APPENDIX I

Observational Protocol

PROTOCOL TITLE: The influence of literature circles upon the self-efficacy of reluctant and struggling readers

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Elena Venegas, MEd.

Date of observation:	
Study participant:	
Observation number:	
<i>Descriptive notes</i>	<i>Reflective notes</i>

APPENDIX J

Literature Circle Role Sheet: Artful Artist

Artful Artist

It is your job to draw a picture related to the pages you read today in class. Your picture can be specifically about today's reading or something today's reading reminded you of (an idea, an event in your life, or a feeling.)

Your picture can be a sketch, cartoon, stick figure, scene, diagram, or flow chart.

Some ideas that you could use for your drawing could be the following:

*a character	*a problem	*an exciting part
*the setting	*a surprise	*a prediction

Presentation Plan:

When the Discussion Director invites you to participate, you should:

- Show your picture without comment to others in your group.
- Ask them to speculate (wonder) what your picture means.
- Tell your group what your picture means.

Remember to make a prediction for you next reading.

APPENDIX K

Literature Circle Role Sheet: Connector

Connector

It is your job to find connections between the book and another text/media or the outside world. You are responsible to use your schema to make a connection with the story. This should include a connection with both words and an image.

Your table should look like this...

When I read the part about...	It reminded me of...
Words:	Words:
Image:	Image:

Presentation Plan:

When the Discussion Director invites you to participate, you should:

- Share your connections to other texts/media or world.

Remember to make a prediction for your next read.

APPENDIX L

Literature Circle Role Sheet: Discussion Director

Discussion Director

It is your job to develop a list of questions that your group should discuss about the part of the story you read today in class.

Your BIG IDEA questions should:

- Help your group talk over the big ideas in today's reading.
- Share their reactions or feelings toward today's reading.
- Make an inference to answer one of your questions and use clues from the story.

Your questions should start with...

*"What if..."	"What would happen if..."
*"Why do you think..."	"How did..." "If..."

Presentation Plan:

You are in charge of directing the conversation for your group, you should:

- Be sure that only one person is talking at a time.
- Everyone else is listening!
- Each group member is given the opportunity to share and have the group talk about the big ideas.

Remember to make a prediction for your next reading.

APPENDIX M

Literature Circle Role Sheet: Literacy Luminary

Literacy Luminary

It is your job to locate a few special sections that you think your group would like to read aloud from what you read today in class.

The sections that you select should help people remember some sections of the text that are...

*interesting

*powerful

*funny

*puzzling

*important

Your comment should look like this:

1. Page(s): _____ Paragraph # _____

I chose this section because

Presentation Plan:

When the Discussion Director invites you to participate, you should:

- Find/read the paragraph(s) you wanted to discuss.
- Discuss why you chose this section.

Remember to make a prediction for your next reading.

APPENDIX N

Literature Circle Role Sheet: Summarizer

Summarizer

It is your job to prepare a brief summary of what you read today in class.

Your summary should be a brief statement (5 to 8 sentences) that covers the following items:

- *the main idea (important events of today's reading)
- *the introduction of any new characters or setting
- *problems and/or solutions

Write your summary and 4 important events that happened in today's reading.

Summary:

Key Points:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Presentation Plan:

When the Discussion Director invites you to participate, you should:

- Discuss your summary and key points with the group.

Remember to make a prediction for your next reading.

APPENDIX O

Literature Circle Role Sheet: Word Wizard

Word Wizard

It is your job to be on the lookout for unknown or interesting words as you read today in class. You are responsible to infer the meaning of the word and look the word up in the dictionary or online.

Your table should look like this:

Page #	Word	Inference	Definition

Presentation Plan:

When the Discussion Director invites you to participate, you should:

- Find/discuss the words and your inference.
- Ask them to speculate (wonder) what the word means.
- Tell your group the dictionary meaning.

Remember to make a prediction for your next reading.

APPENDIX P

Observation Checklist

Observation Checklist

STUDENT NAME _____

<i>Rubric Items</i>	<i>Date/Comments/Observation</i>
<p>Understanding of Literature Discussion</p> <p>Do the students know what types of things to talk about? Is there trouble beginning a discussion or picking a new topic? (<i>"What do we talk about?"</i>)</p>	
<p>Do the students articulate what confuses them? (<i>"I didn't understand why the character chose to return home."</i>)</p>	
<p>Do the students theorize about confusing sections of the text? (<i>"I wonder if it means that she was sorry for what she had done?"</i>)</p>	
<p>Do the students give evidence from the text for their opinions and evaluations? (<i>"It says right here in the book that she was afraid."</i>) What type of evidence do they give? Is it based on their own experiences or the text or something else? (<i>"I would never do that if that happened to me."</i>)</p> <p>Can the students talk about who else might like the book? (<i>"My little sister would like this book better than I did."</i>)</p>	
<p>Do the students try to understand the book from others' perspectives, such as the author or main character? (<i>"I think the author was making a point about how tough life was back then." "I don't like that the main character joined a gang, but I guess he felt he had to."</i>)</p>	

Rubric Items	Date/Comments/Observation
<p>Student Interaction</p> <p>Do the students respond to each other's ideas? What are their responses like? Do they agree or disagree with each other's ideas? (<i>"I agree that she was selfish, but I think she had reasons for being a brat. It wasn't her fault."</i>)</p>	
<p>Are the students willing to disagree? How do they go about disagreeing if they do? (<i>"I don't think that's right. I think she had a good reason for being mean to her sister."</i>)</p>	
<p>Are the students willing to share tentative ideas, things they haven't thought through completely? (<i>"I've been wondering if that wasn't because things were different then . . . well not different completely, but . . . do you know what I mean?"</i>)</p>	
<p>Do the students ask questions of others? What types of questions do they ask? (<i>"Did you like the book, Ryan? What do you think the character should have done?"</i>)</p>	
<p>How does student participation change in different groups?</p>	
<p>Critical Thinking</p> <p>Are the students willing to reconsider ideas in light of new evidence? What do students do when presented with conflicting evidence? (<i>"That's a good point . . . I forgot that she had made the promise to her friend."</i>)</p>	
<p>Do the students actively theorize about the world or are they dependent on others to tell them the right answers? (<i>"Well, it might be that . . ." as opposed to "I don't know. What do you think?"</i>)</p>	

Rubric Items	Date/Comments/Observation
<p>Are the students willing or hesitant to disagree with sources of authority? ("I don't care if the books says . . ." as opposed to "Well, the book says so . . . so it must be true.")</p>	
<p>Does the student see others as sources of expertise on which to draw? ("Let's ask Drew. He knows a lot about baseball.")</p>	
<p>When the students give reasons for their opinions, are those reasons internal ("That doesn't fit my experience") or are they external, depending on outside authorities, including their parents, their peers, their friends, the book, or other adults? ("My teacher last year said it means this.")</p>	
<p>Do the students identify complexity in answers or do they just determine ideas as right or wrong? ("I wonder if she was mean because of all the times people let her down," as opposed to "She was mean and that's all that matters.")</p>	
<p>Do the students look for multiple explanations or does one suffice? ("He joined the army for excitement . . . or maybe he felt he had to join the army to help his sister . . . or maybe he wanted to get out of his terrible home situation.")</p>	
<p>Literary Content knowledge What content knowledge do students use? Do they use terms such as character, setting, tone, theme, foreshadowing? Do they talk about terms without having a name for them?</p>	
<p>Do students notice the sound and feel of language? Do they attend to devices such as metaphor and simile and how they help them enjoy a book?</p>	

APPENDIX Q

Student Interview #2 Protocol

1. Do you like to read? Why or why not?
2. How would you describe yourself as a reader? Why did you describe yourself that way?
3. During our first interview, you described yourself as a reader as (characteristics stated by the student in the first interview.)
 - a. If there were marked differences between the student's self-description as a reader between the first and second interviews: What do you think may have caused you to see yourself differently as a reader now as opposed to our first interview?
 - b. If there were not any differences between the student's self-descriptions as a reader between the first and second interviews: Why do you think that your description of yourself as a reader has virtually stayed the same?
4. You took a survey called the Reader Self-Perception Scale or RSPS. From your score on the RSPS, you seemed to be (describe characteristic as indicated by the RSPS post-test.) Why do you think your score indicated those characteristics?
5. Questions concerning Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS)
 - a. There were some differences in your score between the first Reader Self-Perception Scale, or RSPS, and the second RSPS that you took. These differences were (describe differences.) What do you think led to these differences? Why?
 - b. There were not any differences in your score between the first Reader Self-Perception Scale, or RSPS, and the second RSPS that you took. Why do you think that your score remained virtually the same?
6. Which book did your literature circle read? What did you think of (title of book), and why? Could you relate to the book in any way? If yes, how so? If not, would you have preferred to read a book that you could relate to more? What would that book look like or be about?
7. Do you think that the members of your literature circle perceived you any differently than they did before you met together as a literature circle? If yes, why? If no, why not?
8. Have there been any changes in the types of comments that you receive about yourself as a reader since participating in a literature circle? These comments can be from your classmates/peers, Mrs. Ian, your family, etc. If yes, can you give me some examples of the kinds of comments that you've received?
9. Did you feel like you had something valuable to contribute to your literature circle? If yes, please tell me an example or examples. If no, why not?
10. Did participating in a literature circle help you to identify any of your strengths as a reader?

- a. If yes: Why? What would you say are your strengths as a reader?
 - b. If no: Why not?
11. Did participating in a literature circle help you to identify any of your opportunities for improvement, or weakness, as a reader?
- a. If yes: Why? What would you say are your opportunities for improvement as a reader?
 - b. If no: Why not?
12. Do you think participating in a literature circle has changed you as a reader? If so, in what ways? If no, why not?
13. How would you describe your experience in a literature circle—positive, negative, or neither? Please give me some examples that show how your experience as (positive/negative/neither).
14. Do you think that participating in a literature circle changed how you perceive yourself as a member of your classroom community? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
15. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about yourself as a reader?

APPENDIX R

Student Focus Group Protocol

1. Did anyone participate in a literature circle before you joined this research study?
 - a. If yes, please describe your previous experience in a literature circle.
 - b. If no, what did you first think when you heard that Mrs. Ian was integrating literature circles in her classroom?
2. Are literature circles different than the type of literacy instruction that you typically received?
 - a. If yes, in what ways do literature circles differ from the typical literacy instruction you've received? Did you like this (these) differences? Why or why not?
 - b. If no, in what ways are literature circles similar to the literacy instruction that you typically receive?
3. Did you enjoy participating in the literature circle? Why or why not?
4. What characteristic(s) of literature circles did you like the most, if any? Why?
5. What characteristic(s) of literature circles did you like the least, if any? Why?
6. Did participating in a literature circle lead you to want to read more, less, or about the same as before? Why?
7. Do you think that participating in a literature circle changed how you see yourself as a reader? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
8. Do you think that participating in a literature circle changed how other people see you as a reader? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
9. Would you like to participate in a literature circle again? Why or why not?
10. Do you think that participating in a literature circle changed how you see yourself as a student? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
11. Do you think that participating in a literature circle changed how other people see you as a student? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
12. Did participating in a literature circle change your perspective on how open you can be with your feelings in class? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
13. Do you feel like your voice was better heard in Mrs. Ian's class and/or in school because of your participation in literature circles? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?
14. Do you think that more teachers should use literature circles in their classrooms? Why or why not?
15. What are some ways that teachers can help you better enjoy reading?

APPENDIX S

Classroom Teacher Interview Protocol

1. Please tell me about yourself.
2. Have you ever incorporated literature circles into your literacy instruction prior to this study?
 - a. If yes: When? What did you think of your previous literature circle experience?
 - b. If no: Why not?
3. Were there any factors that lead you to want to incorporate literature circles into your literacy instruction with this particular group of students?
4. How well do you think that the literature circles functioned in your classroom?
5. Are there any benefits to incorporating literature circles in your classroom? If yes, what are those benefits? If no, why not?
6. Are there any drawbacks to incorporating literature circles in your classroom? If yes, what are those drawbacks?
7. In your opinion, did participating in literature circles have any influence upon the reluctant and/or struggling readers in your classroom? If yes, please describe that influence. If no, why not?
8. Do you think that literature circle participation has lead other students to perceive the reluctant and/or struggling readers in your class any differently? If yes, how? If no, why not?
9. Did integrating literature circles in your classroom have an impact on student voice? If yes, how? Please provide examples.
10. How would you describe (student case's name) as a reader before he or she participated in literature circles?
11. How receptive do you think (student case's name) was to participating in a literature circle?
12. Have you noticed any changes in (student case's name) as a reader or as a student in general after his or her participation in literature circles?
13. Would you implement literature circles in your classroom again? Why or why not?
14. In your opinion, should literacy instruction be student-centered or teacher-centered or a balance of both? Why? Has integrating literature circles in your classroom changed your perspective of that question in any way?
15. Is there anything else that you would like to share with me about yourself as a teacher or about your experience with literature circles?

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