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Literate Identity Development in First Grade: A Cross-Case Analysis of Students with Strong and Emerging Decoding Skills

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Abstract: The purpose of this yearlong study was to examine literate identity development of first-grade students in a student-centered, literature-based classroom where meaning making was privileged over decoding skills. This cross-case analysis traced the identity trajectories of two case studies: one student with strong decoding skills (above grade level performance) and one student with emerging decoding skills (below grade level performance). Sociocultural theories provided a framework for the data collection and analysis with an understanding that meaning is co-constructed in situated contexts as children take up literacy practices to participate in identity negotiations. This study utilized a formative design with a pedagogical goal of developing positive literate identities. Discourse analysis was used to analyze and trace the identity trajectories of a strong and emerging decoder over the course of a year. Both students negotiated positive identities by taking up accepted classroom literacy practices. Similarities, differences, and implications for instruction are explored.

Keywords: identity, early literacy, literature-based, decoding, early childhood

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Introduction[1]

The purpose of this study was to examine literate identity development of first-grade students in a student-centered, literature-based classroom over an academic year. This cross-case analysis traced the identity trajectories of two case studies: one student with strong decoding skills (above grade level performance) and one student with emerging decoding skills (below grade level performance). Decoding is defined as "identifying words by using letter-sound and structural analysis" (Morrow, 2012, p. 502). We define decoding skills as the skills used in the process of translating print to speech (letter/phoneme correspondence, word recognition, identifying chunks/portions of words, etc.). While there remains a tendency towards an emphasis on decoding and basic skills (phonemic awareness, sight word recognition, phonics, and word analysis) in early literacy instruction (Allington, 2013), the first-grade classroom in this study prioritized meaning making, talk, and a love of reading, with decoding skills being seen as only one means to access text. We examined ways in which two young readers of various decoding abilities were positioned (by teachers, administrators, and peers) and positioned themselves as readers in the classroom community of practice. Inclusive literacy practices for young readers provide opportunities for positive identity development and membership in classroom communities of practice (Guccione, 2011; Moses, 2013; Moses & Kelly, 2017). This identity development is critically important because learners' identities ultimately influence how they participate in the literate community (Hall, 2009; Hall, 2012).

The following research questions guided this study:

1) In what ways do students with emerging and strong decoding abilities position themselves as literate members of the classroom community over an academic year?

2) What similarities and differences in identity development are present between students with strong and emerging decoding abilities over an academic year?

Identity research provides insight into understanding schools, society, and human experiences (Gee, 2001). As Moje, Luke, Davies, & Street (2009) note, identity can be used to stereotype, marginalize, or privilege. In many primary classrooms, decoding and basic skills are privileged over meaning-making (Allington, 2013). With an emphasis on decoding skills, many students who are still learning to decode can be marginalized or stereotyped as a "struggling" reader (Möller, 2004, Moses & Kelly, 2017). The identities made available to students with emerging decoding abilities in these settings positions them as "struggling" or "poor readers" in comparison to their peers. There remains a need for identity research in primary classrooms where there are opportunities for positive literate identity development regardless of decoding abilities. In this study, we examine ways in which students with strong and emerging decoding abilities were able to position themselves as competent members of the literate community. We examine their use of "accepted" classroom literacy practices as cultural tools to position themselves, and how, ultimately, meaning making and discussion of comprehension was privileged over any other literacy practice.

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[1] We acknowledge that there is a gender spectrum and that myriad pronouns exist that we can use when referring to individuals in our writing. Throughout this article we use pronouns to refer to individuals that correspond with the pronouns that they use to refer to themselves.

Theoretical Framework

We adopt a sociocultural framework and agree with other scholars that meaning is made in context and co-construction through dialogue arising from cooperative inquiry (Beach & Myers, 2001; Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Tejeda, 1999; Rosebery, Warren, & Conant, 1992). Collaborative communities that are student-centered, as opposed to highly structured, teacher-directed settings, allow students to learn from and alongside each other (Wells, 1999). Haneda and Wells (2008) argue that there is a need for dialogic inquiry because discourse plays an essential social role in the construction of knowledge.

We drew on the theoretical work related to the co-development of communities of practice and identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). We approached our study using this theoretical frame to better understand the classroom experiences, community practices, identity and academic development over time in this first-grade classroom community of practice. Every community of practice has its accepted practices, and members are able to negotiate identities based on the knowledge of and ability to participate in the practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991). There remains a large focus on decoding and accessing printed text in the primary grades (Allington, 2013, Compton-Lilly, 2008; Hudson, Lane, & Pullen, 2005; Rasinski, 2012; Riedel, 2007), so we sought to understand the similarities and differences in use of literacy practices as tools for identity development among a strong and a striving decoder in a student-centered classroom.

The instructional approach and the student experiences, relationships, and interactions influence the constant student identity negotiations and community development. Wertsch (1998) argued that students' evolving identities as learners and successful members of a community shape and are shaped by engagement, growing mastery, and appropriation of cultural tools. As this happens over time, students engage in discursive practices that eventually become cultural resources for identity negotiations as learners and members of the community (Putney, 2007). We studied the use of the cultural tools and identity "craftwork" (Lave, 1996) in order to provide a rich, thick description of how our case studies developed patterned ways of interacting with peers and texts that became resources for identity negotiations.

Literature Review

For students, becoming literate means reading and writing texts that are deemed appropriate in school-sanctioned ways (Compton-Lily, 2006). Students in the early primary grades are in the process of developing an understanding of accepted literacy practices and processes. Literate identities are closely related to these understandings; they quickly identify reading behaviors that their teachers expect them to adopt and try on roles during literacy experiences at school (Rogers & Elias, 2012). However, developing the identity as a competent reader poses a challenge for students with limited decoding abilities and is often difficult to achieve without the support of teachers.

As McCarthey and Moje (2002) posit, "power plays a role in how identities get enacted and how people get positioned" (p. 231). The classroom hierarchy of reading ability and the possession of identity capital—the characters of valued identities (Cote & Levine, 2002)—limit "struggling" readers' agency to

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negotiate their identities (Hall, 2010). Scherer (2016) suggests that children's reading identities and selves-as-readers are informed by their teachers' assessment of them as readers. As children grapple strongly to negotiate with the reading hierarchies created by accountability policy and the emphasis on literacy assessment scores, they construct consoling narratives to avoid the stigma of being recognized as "poor" readers, seeking alternative sources of positive identities other than reading.

Hall (2010) finds that though readers who "struggle" may value developing reading abilities, learning content, and acquiring the identity capital that their teachers associate with good readers, they may attach greater value to their social positioning in the classroom. The teachers in Hall's study had their models of identity for what it meant to be a good or poor reader, and their control over and enforcement of these models of identity could influence students to align themselves with one camp or the other and put limitations on who they could become in that context. The students approached reading tasks in ways that they hoped to prevent their peers, teachers, or family members from constructing a discursive identity of them as poor readers, such as by remaining silent and working alone instead of talking about texts with group members. The teachers paid little attention to how students' developing literate identities affected the decisions they made with reading tasks, and they misinterpreted these behaviors as lack of motivation to become better readers and thus marginalized the students, allowing them to remain in their position as readers who struggled.

The hierarchy of academic achievement not only affects students' self-perceptions as readers but also how they are positioned by their peers in discursive events involving literacy. Bourdieu (1989, 1994) coined the terms cultural capital, social capital, economic capital, and symbolic capital to capture different forms of assets that afford people's social standing in distinct social fields. Symbolic capital refers to "the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 23).

Borrowing Bourdieu's concepts of capital, Christian and Bloome (2004) contend that learning to read can affirm some students' position relative to other students in a social hierarchy of 'becoming readers', a status that provides them with privileges in the classroom (i.e., symbolic capital). Although the focal English language learners in their study might have the cultural (i.e., knowledge valued by a classroom culture and the ability to engage in social practices) and linguistic capital (i.e., knowledge about language and the ability to engage in language practices in a classroom) to participate in a literacy event, they were not able to take on more dominant social identities. This was due to their lack of symbolic capital, which jeopardized their opportunity to deepen their understanding about the text and engage in comprehension. "Who children are" in terms of classroom community of practice positioning (e.g. "A" student, high-level reader, ESL student) influences what happens during a discursive event and the symbolic capital they bring to the event. The uneven distribution of symbolic capital among students depending on "who they are" constrains the ability of students with lower status to show competence as readers and writers (Christian & Bloome, 2004).

Surprisingly, even active learning or the construction of a seemingly successful reader identity could mask what students cannot do as readers (Walters, 2011). Walters reveals that bilingual children's resourceful utilization of their home language and literacy practices was not simply directed towards the goal of decoding and comprehending texts, but constructing a social identity of belonging to their mainstream

classrooms and fitting in. In this case, becoming a successful member of a community through reading takes precedence over becoming a competent and independent reader. In her study, a bilingual student's excellence in decoding and orally performing texts led his teacher to regard him as a bright and able boy with no language needs, and she attributed his poor work to his "laziness", "attitude," or "cultural background," rather than his challenge with reading for meaning.

To facilitate positive literate identity development of students who need additional support related to literacy skills expected in schools, teachers need to be aware of curricular policies and procedures that constrain the identities students can assume in the classroom (Christian & Bloome, 2004) and to create opportunities for students to transform themselves without having to marginalize themselves to save a valuable sense of self (Hall, 2010). As children have different cultural models of reading across domains of home literacy and school literacy, they position themselves differently as readers across domains; one student can be an active and enthusiastic reader at home, but a passive observer in the classroom during reading time (Rogers & Elias, 2012). Therefore, Rogers and Elias suggest that teachers create space for acceptance and celebration related to literacies students bring from their lives outside the school to foster a positive stance towards reading.

Similarly, Compton-Lily (2006) proposes that childhood and cultural resources play an important role in developing "struggling" readers' literacy learning and their identity development as readers. For her case, a first-grade African American student named Devon, his desire to become "a cool, video game playing, male superhero" (p. 74) did not initially align with being a reader and a writer in the classroom. However, when given opportunities to access his cultural resources such as rap music and

pursue his interest in superheroes and Pokémon, resources that are central to his identity and peer affiliations, he was able to learn to read and write and demonstrate his expertise among to his teachers and peers.

As literacy education in primary grades has considerably focused on the development of decoding skills, the role of comprehension can often be overlooked. Within the domain of school, there is evidence showing that children hold competing cultural models of reading: the primary model includes phonics and sounding-out words, while the secondary model includes making connections to stories and characters and a love of reading (Rogers & Elias, 2012). The literate identities that children construct differ and show complexity according to different contexts involving literacy (2012). As the reviewed literature shows, teachers need to develop instructional approaches and literacy practices for students with emerging decoding skills to show their expertise and strengths as readers (e.g., Compton-Lily, 2006; Moses & Kelly, 2017). Although previous research has examined how self-identified high-performing readers and low-performing readers engage in reading differently (Hall, 2012), the differences and similarities regarding literate identity development between competent and emerging decoders need further exploration. Therefore, our study is intended to address this gap of knowledge by looking at how positive identity development can be fostered for first graders with different decoding abilities in an inquiry-based classroom.

Methods

This study is part of a larger, yearlong formative study (Reinking & Bradley, 2008) in which the pedagogical goals and interventions were focused on developing a love of reading, increasing the amount of interpretive talk related to text, and developing

positive identities as readers. This portion of the study focuses on the development of positive literate identities by examining the ways students with emerging and strong decoding abilities position themselves as literate members of the classroom community and identifying similarities and differences in identity development between students with emerging and strong decoding abilities.

We investigated the research questions using a microethnographic approach by focusing on specific interactions in a particular setting (first-grade classroom language arts block) (Moll, Diaz, Estrada, & Lopes, 1992). This approach does not attempt to describe a "whole way of life" (p. 341), and we only collected data from the classroom setting. While we value the importance of home and community influence on identity, data collection outside of the classroom was not within the scope of this study.

Setting

The research setting was located in a public elementary school with 35% of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch in a suburb in the Southwest United States. We purposefully selected a student-centered, literature-based first-grade classroom where meaning making was privileged by the teacher. The first-grade classroom consisted of 26 students with a range of cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Their entry DRA (Developmental Reading Assessment) scores ranged from 2-18. The DRA was the formative reading assessment required by the school district. With a goal of identifying the school context and community in relation to identity positioning with our case studies, we selected to use the assessment scores to help identify the levels of proficiency (as

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they are documented and used in the schooling context). The DRA is a criterion-referenced assessment that has been documented as a "valid measurement of accuracy, fluency and comprehension as evidenced by the following validity measurements: (1) Criterion-Related Validity, (2) Construct Validity, and (3) Content Validity" (Pearson Education, n.d.).

The school adopted a core reading curriculum, but the classroom teacher, Mary, opted not to use it with permission from her principal. She used a workshop-based approach to teaching reading instruction (Serafini, 2001). The general structure of the literacy block was as follows:

- 10-15 minutes mini-lesson
- 20 minutes of independent reading and reading work while the teacher confers and pulls small groups
- 10 minutes whole-class discussion, reflection, or mini-lesson
- 25-30 minutes of partner reading and discussion while the teacher confers and pulls small groups
- 10 minutes of discussion group and sharing

Curriculum was designed by the teacher based on identified student needs and development. All mini-lessons were conducted with picturebooks (authentic literature that is sold to the public, not a basal or anthology), brief modeling of a strategy that could be used during independent reading, and active student engagement. The teacher had a classroom library with over 3,000 children's books, and the students picked 10 new books every Friday. Students read self-selected texts and documented their thinking and strategy-use on sticky notes. These sticky notes were used to guide and contribute to conversations during whole-class discussion groups, small-group discussion groups,

and partner reading and conversations. Then, these sticky notes were placed in a reading notebook at the end of the week. The classroom teacher would collect them and use that information to inform her future instruction.

Participants

Teacher Participant. The classroom teacher, Mary, has 12 years of teaching in the primary grades. She has a M.A. in Literacy Education and specializations in Early Childhood and English as a Second Language. She has been selected by her school district to be the first-grade innovator/model/demonstration teacher. One teacher at each grade level across the district is selected to teach in a classroom that is fully equipped with video and audio, so teachers across the district can view their teaching at any time. Teachers from across the state and undergraduate students come to the school and go to the viewing room to observe her teaching. After observations, she meets with teachers to debrief and answer questions. She is also the co-author of a pedagogy/professional development book based on the instruction she provides in her classroom.

Student Participants. Anna was a seven-year-old first-grade student whose home and only language was English. In a beginning of the year interview, she reported enjoying reading and reading for pleasure at home. She performed a year above grade-level on her beginning of the year Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) and was a strong and confident decoder who regularly volunteered to read and was frequently approached to help decode words from other students. Christopher was a seven-year-old first-grade student whose home and only language was English. In a beginning of the year interview, he reported enjoying reading. Christopher performed a year below grade level on his beginning of the year DRA.

He was often frustrated by his challenges of decoding text but had high levels of listening comprehension and regularly contributed to classroom conversations about read alouds.

Data Collection

We video recorded the literacy block once a week in a first-grade classroom for an academic year. The recordings captured whole-group and small-group instruction, partner reading, independent reading, teacher conferences, and discussion groups. We kept field notes, observational checklists, and researcher journals. We conducted and recorded interviews with students about their perspectives on literacy and their literate identity at the beginning and end of the year, as well as interviews with the teacher throughout the year. We collected student artifacts and took photographs of the classroom environment, student work, and students engaging in reading.

Data Analysis

We completed the initial layer of analysis weekly by transcribing the video recordings and used open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) to document and discover meaning concerning identity and positionality from video transcriptions. After completing transcriptions and open coding, we began pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994), through which we grouped initial codes and identified recurring literacy practices that served as cultural tools to enact literate identities.

We defined *literacy practices* in this study as students' engagement with written language in literacy events. We conceptualized *literacy events* as social spaces in which students and the teacher concertedly acted upon their circumstances and literacy practices to create meaning (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005). The pattern codes of Literacy Practices included the following

subcategories: decoding skills (e.g., sounding out the word, backing up and reading again, using the pictures), comprehension skills (e.g., making connections, wondering, new learning, making inferences, inferring the author's message, describing character traits, finding supporting evidence, viewing, etc.), interpretive talk, literal talk, discourse patterns signaling participation, and classroom behaviors. We discovered that decoding and comprehension were the two literacy practices most closely associated with identity development and will elaborate the associations in the findings section.

The Discourse Analysis (Gee, 2011; Tannen & Wallat, 2006) of literacy events was guided by four concepts/categories of analysis related to the identity development of the two case studies: signaled identities, general support or description for identity claims, ritualistic behaviors, and frames and registers (Tannen & Wallat, 2006). Signaled identities answer questions such as what identities the speaker is trying to enact or to get others to recognize, what identities the speaker recognizes for others in connection with his or her own, and how the speaker is positioning others (Gee, 2014). General support/description for identity claims provide evidence in the context that explain how certain identities are signaled during communication.

The notion of frame refers to "a sense of what activity is being engaged in, how speakers mean what they say" (Tannen & Wallat, 2006, p. 334). Frames are created and negotiated by interlocutors moment by moment in conversation. Linguistic registers are one key element in frames and refer to variations due to use of "conventionalized lexical, syntactic and prosodic choices deemed appropriate for the setting and audience" (p. 337). Register shifting is one way to accomplish shifts between frames. We utilized these four analytic tools to

examine student and teacher discourse during whole-class, small-group, and partner reading events as we traced the identity trajectories of our case studies over the academic year. We include these tools in our transcriptions and tables presented in our findings as a way to address concerns presented by Smagorinsky (2008) about transparency and illustrative presentation of data and analysis to support our claims.

Researcher Positionality

The research team included an associate professor in the field of literacy education and a doctoral student. The classroom teacher was a former graduate student of the lead researcher, and this was the second year-long study that involved the lead researcher and teacher participant. The lead researcher regularly conferred with students and periodically co-taught lessons and ran small groups. This positionality of a participant observer allowed for the establishment of relationships with the teacher and children. The teacher and students regularly spoke openly with the lead researcher. However, we recognize that our roles as researchers and the teacher's former professor influenced what the teacher and children said and did. We also recognize that the integrated role of participant observer can create the bias of an "insider." We reflected on this with the teacher, requested member checks from the teacher to confirm or refute our findings, and used multiple data points to triangulate our claims in attempt to control for our positionality and bias.

Findings

Discourse analysis of the two case studies revealed how literacy practices were mastered and appropriated to mediate action and lead to positive signaled identity. The case studies' identity negotiations and positioning were most frequently

observed in relation to the use of the two most commonly observed literacy practices: decoding and comprehension. In the following sections, we address the first research question by describing and defining the literacy practices of decoding and comprehension that students most frequently used to position themselves as literate members of the classroom community. Then, we provide our findings for the second research question that examined the similarities and differences of identity trajectories as related to these practices throughout the course of the year.

Decoding

Decoding skills provided students with access to written text, metacognition about reading processes, modeling opportunities in front of the whole class, coaching opportunities during partner reading, and a source of pride (or frustration) for sharing with their peers and the teacher how they navigated the text. For Anna, being a strong decoder positioned her as an expert and model for other students for text selection and independent reading. Anna was also able to position herself as a coach or teacher when her partner had difficulty decoding a word. In contrast, Christopher's challenge with decoding led him to position himself as a frustrated reader seeking help from the teacher. We also observed the teacher and peers positioning Christopher as needing support because of his decoding abilities. For example, in the beginning of the year, although Christopher named and used decoding fix-up strategies (such as sounding it out, looking for known parts, rereading, making the first sound and checking the pictures, skipping the word and reading until the end of the sentence before

rereading, etc.), students partnered to read with Christopher said things like, "Christopher's book is too easy for me" and "Christopher is just listening to me read because my book is too hard for him."

Comprehension

Comprehension strategy documentation (e.g., new learning, noticings, connections, and wondering) facilitated the construction of meaning in multiple ways. It supported metacognitive strategy use, documented thinking, and served as a tool for discussion with peers to deepen student understandings. Strategy documentation often utilized language frames, which became patterned ways of interacting and talking about texts and allowed students to share knowledge and fully participate in the community of readers regardless of decoding skills. Both Anna and Christopher actively positioned themselves and were positioned by the teacher as competent readers who used comprehension strategy documentation to share their thinking during group conversations and partner talk. Although Christopher was an emerging decoder, his listening comprehension skills enabled him to make meaningful connections to the text during read alouds and to position himself as a deep thinker. Because comprehension and discussion held significant importance in this classroom community, his knowledge and contributions allowed him to renegotiate his identity in positive ways.

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Identity Development Similarities and Differences Over Time: Beginning of the Year

During the year prior to this study, both Anna and Christopher were in a kindergarten classroom that emphasized decoding, high-frequency word memorization, and words correct per minute (multiple timed reading exercises daily). The students did not independently read picturebooks during the school day (picturebooks were used for whole-class read alouds), and their Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessment scores were displayed as a way to track their progress (as well as display who was scoring the highest and lowest on the DIBELS). Both of these experiences may have influenced their initial views on reading and what makes a good reader during the beginning of the year. In contrast to Mary's emphasis on meaning making, the initial student valuing of reading fast and automatically identifying words persisted through the first six weeks of class. In the following sections, we share detailed findings from our discourse analysis for each case study for the beginning of the year and end of the year. Finally, we discuss the similarities and differences in Christopher and Anna's positive identity negotiations.

Anna: A Strong and Competitive Decoder with Confidence. Anna was the strongest decoder in the research classroom, according to her DIBELs scores. Her ability to decode allowed her to access books and text in ways many other students were not yet experiencing. Students would often ask her for help when they encountered a word they did not know. These types of interactions regularly positioned her as an expert in the classroom community of readers who were newly learning to decode. While Mary emphasized meaning making, students continued to negotiate status and identity by the number of pages they read and speed of their reading during the first six weeks of school. Table 1 includes a representative

transcript of one such interaction where Anna repeatedly used her number of pages read to position herself as an expert while simultaneously positioning another group member as a slow reader who was behind everyone (see Table 1).

The students in the transcript were part of a discussion group book club where they agreed upon how much they would read and met weekly (with the support of Mary) to discuss their reading and thinking about the text, characters, questions, etc. The students met at the back table and were waiting while the teacher was helping another group, so they were talking informally while the camera was running. When analyzing this transcript for signaled identities, we also examined support for the signaled identities along with ritualistic behaviors that contextualize the talk and identities. Finally, we coded the transcripts for various frames and linguistic registers. In this literacy event, we found the following three frames: student-led cooperative frame, competitive frame, and teacher-direct/student roles frame. We found the linguistic registers of co-group member (collaborative) and confident/competitive.

As shown in Table 1, the girls begin their conversations by asking and telling each other what page they are on. During this initial stage, the students are participating in ritualistic behaviors of student-led discussion and informal talk about books. Within a student-led cooperative frame, students are taking up co-group member registers to participate in a collaborative informal discussion. However, there is a frameshift from student-led cooperative to competitive when Ava compares herself to others and uses the adverb "only" to position herself as a slow reader falling behind the others. Anna stays with the shift of frame to competitive frame as she positions herself as a strong reader and group leader using a confident/competitive register as related to

decoding when she tells Ava they all passed her. Julia quickly tries to shift the frame back to student-led cooperative with a co-group member register when she uses the preposition "except" to try to exclude herself and Cameron from Anna's competitive frame and support Ava by sharing their reading progress. However, Anna takes up her confident/competitive register to continue to position herself above everyone when she says, "I am passed all of you then. I'm passed you, you, and you." Even after Mary emphasizes that it is not a race, but it is about learning about the characters and what is happening in the book, Anna continues to use decoding as a tool to position herself as the expert when she says "Well, since you guys haven't probably got to this point." Throughout the course of the year, we regularly observed Anna using decoding to establish her expertise and position herself as a "better" reader than her peers. Because she and her peers placed value on decoding and amount of decoding at the beginning of the year, her self-positioning of a strong reader happened regularly and with ease.

Christopher: An Emerging Decoder with Strong Comprehension Skills. While Christopher's decoding skills were early emergent, he was able to contribute his thoughts to whole-group read aloud activities. When reading aloud, Mary not only passionately modeled to students what reading with accuracy and expression was like, but also allowed students to voice their thoughts about the text she read. It was the switch from the teacher-directed/student roles frame to the participatory frame during this whole-group activity that allowed Christopher to be positioned as a strong reader who actively made connections to the text being read by the teacher. Usually, within the teacher-directed/student roles frame, Mary stated her expectations for the students, such as listening attentively and quietly and raising their hands before being asked to speak. However, this frame

could seamlessly switch to the participatory frame when students followed these expectations to show their active thinking about the text being read.

In the Table 2 we demonstrate Christopher's positioning as a strong reader during a whole-group reading aloud of *The Gingerbread Cowboy* (Squires & Berry, 2006), through discourse analysis that focused on identities signaled, general support/description, ritualistic behavior, and frame and registers. It could be noticed from this excerpt that after Christopher signaled his willingness to contribute his connection to the text, Mary shifted from the teacher-directed/student roles frame to the participatory frame to show approval to his contribution. Using the discipline register, she signaled students' inappropriate voice level (e.g., "We can't hear your thinking"), directed students' attention to Christopher (e.g., "Christopher raised his hand") and stopped Barret, who voiced his thought earlier in the conversation, from continuing with his idea (e.g., "it's now Christopher's turn"). The teacher-directed/student role frame thus created the condition for Christopher to voice his thought. When Christopher entered the conversation by talking about his knowledge about javelinas, he initiated the participatory frame in which authentic exchange of ideas and meaning making of the text took place. This frame was sustained by Mary, who paraphrased Christopher's idea, asked for confirmation from him (e.g., "They work together, right?") and later built upon his contribution (e.g., "And they use special sounds to hunt and work together"). Thus, Christopher was positioned as a strong reader whose background knowledge was valued by the teacher during this whole-group read aloud.

Identity Development Similarities and Differences Over Time: End of the Year

Mary continued to emphasize meaning making over speed, phonics, and decoding throughout the first half of the year. She integrated meaning-based discussion groups and the majority of instruction was focused on deepening understanding with inferential talk and thinking.

Anna: Active Contribution to Discussions About Texts. In the beginning of the year, Anna regularly used decoding skills and abilities as a tool to position herself as an expert and stronger than her peers. However, decoding lost social capital in the classroom because the accepted and expected literacy practices were nearly all directly related to meaning making. While students read, they would document their use of comprehension strategies, inferential thinking and reflect about their reading on stickies. These were used to help guide conversations about books. In Table 3 the majority of this literacy event takes place in an informal cooperative frame with students and Mary taking up the sharing register. These informal discussions were collaborative in nature as students shared their thinking, asked questions, and added to other's thinking. In the transcript, Mary calls together the students to reflect on their thinking during reading, but notices that she does not see many stickies and inquires why they are missing. Valentina immediately positions herself as a competent reader who meets expectations by sharing that she has documented her comprehension on stickies. Her sharing is interrupted by Anna challenging the notion that stickies are appropriate for the chapter book they are reading. She positions herself as a strong reader who is independent enough to decide whether or not the classroom practices of using stickies is warranted during reading (using language and tone that were accepted discussion practices).

The conversation continues in a cooperative frame where the students and teacher are using a sharing register to convey their thinking and questioning. When Mary questions Anna about why stickies would not be appropriate, she argues that it is difficult to interpret character feelings. Even after Valentina gives a supporting example of using the pictures to infer feelings and Mary adds that the words provide information about this, Anna persists in her argument by sharing that the chapter book pictures in another text are generic with happy faces all throughout. Here she is able to establish herself as an expert who understands the purpose of the stickies and when to use them but is challenging the context in which her peers are using them. Mary confirms this positioning by saying her thinking is interesting, as opposed to telling her to go back and add the stickies. This reading event is one example of how Anna continued to work to position herself as a literacy expert throughout the year. This was possible, in part, because students were able to hold discussions and challenge thinking and processes as part of the accepted practices involved in the cooperative frame of discussion groups. As the classroom community of practice developed and values were clearly placed on meaning making her tools shifted from practices related to decoding to those of meaning making.

Christopher: Active Contribution to Discussions About Texts. By the end of the academic year, comprehension had gained growing importance in this first-grade student-centered classroom. Though Christopher still decoded texts with labor, he was able to draw on comprehension as a tool to enact his identity as a competent reader in the classroom community. Apart from narrative stories, students started to read more informational texts (e.g., books about animals), and Mary asked them to take on the role of researchers who looked for key facts while they were reading. Engaging in co-researching (including finding key facts, wondering about what

the text does not explicitly state, and documenting their wonders on sticky notes—was what Mary expected the students to be doing during partner reading. In the conversation shown in Table 4 Mary and Christopher were modeling co-researching with a text about caribous. Although Christopher deferred reading aloud to Mary at the beginning of this reading event, he positioned himself as a competent reader by actively contributing to their discussion about caribous.

At the beginning of Table 4, Christopher started reading the caribou text under Mary's encouragement, but he had difficulty pronouncing the word "subarctic." Thus, Mary used the helping register to sound out the word for him, adopting the role of a coach and positioning Christopher as a reader who needed support decoding. While Mary and Christopher were engaging in the partner talk frame, Mary also used the self-examining/monitoring register to repeat key information in the text that Christopher just read (e.g., "They live in the arctic, in the tundra, and in the mountain areas.") and explain to the group what they just did (they answered the big question of where caribous live). She then quickly shifted back to the partner talk frame and ignored the group temporarily by sharing her wondering with Christopher, "I'm wondering, do you think—are they good mountain climbers?" By using the sharing register and seeking Christopher's opinion on her question, Mary positioned Christopher as a knowledgeable reader who could potentially offer insights about her wondering.

As Christopher nodded to her question, he signaled "yes" to Mary's wondering of whether caribous are good mountain climbers. Mary continued using the

> **"students were able to hold discussions and challenge thinking and processes as part of the accepted practices involved in the cooperative frame of discussion groups."**

sharing register to explore more about the topic with Christopher and draw information from him, "Have you learned that yet, in your research?" By asking this question, she positioned Christopher as a researcher of arctic animals. Though Christopher responded he had not learned if caribous were good mountain climbers by saying "not yet," he simultaneously enacted the identity of a reader who engaged in the serious job of researching, indicating that he would continually explore more facts about caribous in his future "research." Instead of taking turns to read more of the text when Christopher did not resolve her wondering, Mary repeated her wondering again and remained in the position of a less knowledgeable and curious reader, which could have encouraged Christopher to make connections to his prior knowledge about goats. Christopher later inferred that caribous had to be good mountain climbers because like goats, they could climb the mountains and stand on a giant rock. Making this meaningful connection enabled him to take on the role of a knowledgeable reader, which was affirmed by Mary as she agreed with his speculation and further inferred that caribous could have hooves just like goats.

The partner talk frame then shifted to the modeling frame as Mary asked other students from the group to evaluate what she and Christopher had been doing during co-researching (the modeling frame overlapped with the partner talk frame, but it became more obvious as Mary addressed the group). Before any student talked about what they noticed about her and Christopher, she invited the group to give Christopher a wow wave, paying him a great compliment and affirming his identity as a competent member in a community of readers. William then commented positively on Mary and

Christopher's modeling by saying that they were both using their brains. Later, students gave more favorable comments, saying that Mary and Christopher were "working together to figure out the things," asking each other questions, and "had a conversation."

Note that none of the students remarked on Christopher's decoding skills or positioned him as a less competent reader because of his less-than-perfect decoding performance when it came to his turn to read during modeling. The positive positioning of Christopher resulted from Mary's persistent use of the sharing register to maintain the partner talk frame during modeling, which enabled Christopher to contribute to their partner talk by connecting his background knowledge to her wondering about caribou. Thus, Christopher's identity development as a knowledgeable reader was facilitated in this reading event, despite his emerging decoding skills.

Similarities

Anna and Christopher both found ways to take up classroom literacy practices to position themselves as competent readers and members of the literate community. Both students were persistent with their use of literacy practices even when challenged by other students or the teacher. For example, Anna continually used decoding in the beginning of the year to position herself as an expert and marginalize her peers even after Mary told her that decoding was not the purpose of the group. She again persisted with her knowledge of comprehension and use of stickies to document inferential thinking to challenge the process and which books were appropriate for this type of work. Likewise, Christopher persisted through challenging decoding and student interruptions to share his meaning making and inferential thinking and background knowledge with the class at the beginning and end

of the year examples. Drawing on his strengths and available classroom literacy practices, he was able to use meaning making and sharing as a way to position himself as a strong reader.

Differences

Anna and Christopher's decoding skills were on opposite ends of the scale both at the beginning and end of the year. While they were both able to continually negotiate positive identities, Anna did more negative positioning of other students. Another difference was that Anna' use of literacy practices to position herself and others changed over time. At the beginning of the year when other students placed greater value on decoding (even though the teacher did not), she used decoding to positively position herself and marginalize a student with more emerging decoding skills. Then, at the end of the year when students placed little to no value on decoding, Anna used comprehension, meaning making, and connecting across texts for positive positioning. Christopher remained consistent throughout the year in relying on meaning making, background knowledge, and oral language to position himself as an expert and competent member of the community.

Discussion

The tendency towards an emphasis on decoding and basic skills in early literacy instruction (Allington, 2013) can create environments where negotiating positive literate identities are challenging for emerging decoders (Möller, 2004; Moses & Kelly, 2017). We sought to add to the current body of research on identity work with readers (Compton-Lily, 2006; Hall, 2010; Möller, 2004; Moses & Kelly, 2017; Schrerer, 2016) by examining the identity negotiations for a year in a student-centered first-grade classroom that emphasized meaning making over decoding skills. Previous research addressed how high-performing readers and low-performing

readers engage in reading differently (Dole, Brown, & Trathen, 1996; Hall, 2012; Hall, Burns, & Edwards, 2011), but there remains a need to explore the differences and similarities of literate identity development between competent and emerging decoders. In this study, we explore the similarities and differences of a strong and emerging decoder to better understand the available tools that mediated positive identity development for both of them throughout the course of the year.

Implications

A narrow focus on one type of skill, particularly decoding, can hinder young students developing a view of themselves as successful participants in a reading community. The use of literacy practices that are inclusive to all learners, regardless of their decoding abilities provides opportunities to create classrooms where all students develop positive identities. In this classroom, Anna was able to fluidly use different literacy practices with ease to position herself. This was possible for Anna because she was already a strong decoder (according to observations and the DRA and DIBELS literacy assessments) who had access to text that many of her peers were not yet able to access independently. In a more traditional first-grade classroom where the emphasis was on decoding, her identity development probably would have been similar at the beginning of the year. Alternatively, Christopher may have struggled to negotiate a positive identity in a setting where emerging decoding skills were seen as problematic and/or where his meaning making abilities were not seen as a valued literacy practice unless they were accompanied by strong decoding skills.

The classroom practices and community of practice in this classroom made space for positive identity negotiations for students with strong or emerging decoding skills. Students like Christopher could build on their strengths to take up and appropriate literacy practices that would allow them to position themselves as a reader.

Limitations

This study has multiple limitations which lend themselves to possibilities for future research. The first limitation is the small number of participants, which limits generalizability. We believe there is a need for deep understanding, like the in-depth analysis we did with two participations. However, we also believe there is a need for a broader understanding of the experiences of more children with diverse backgrounds and educational settings. We also recognize the limitations of the study context. We recognize that family and community practices outside of the school setting greatly influence students' identity and beliefs about literacy practices. Within the scope of this study, we were not able to explore influences outside the school context.

Significance

The significance of this study lay in its attempt to understand how students with high and emerging decoding skills used literacy practices to construct meaning with texts and how they negotiated power, identity, and community membership. In order to truly understand young students' literacy development, one must consider the classroom community of practice which shapes and is shaped by identity constructions. It is only through a deeper understanding of these experiences that we can begin to examine instruction and literacy practices that influence academic literacy development. This study explores how a primary classroom can provide access, knowledge, and participation for a classroom with strong and emerging decoders.

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Table 1

Anna as a Competitive Reader in a Discussion Group

Transcription	Identities Signaled	Linguistic Evidence for Descriptions of Identity		
		General support and/or description	Ritualistic Behavior	Coding for frames and registers
(Girls in the discussion groups are talking excitedly about the page they were on in Ivy and Bean.)	discussion group members	general sharing of reading progress	student-led discussion, informal talk about books	student-led cooperative frame co-group member
Julia: On page 55!	discussion group members	general sharing of reading progress	student-led discussion, informal talk about books	student-led cooperative frame co-group member
Cameron: I passed 41!	discussion group members	general sharing of reading progress	student-led discussion, informal talk about books	student-led cooperative frame co-group member
Anna: (to Ava) I'm on 65.	discussion group members	general sharing of reading progress	student-led discussion, informal talk about books	student-led cooperative frame co-group member
Julia: What page are you on, Anna?	discussion group members	general sharing of reading progress	student-led discussion, informal talk about books	student-led cooperative frame co-group member
Anna: (to Julia) 65!	discussion group members	general sharing of reading progress	student-led discussion, informal talk about books	student-led cooperative frame co-group member
Julia: 55.	discussion group members	general sharing of reading progress	student-led discussion, informal talk about books	student-led cooperative frame co-group member

Anna: I'm on 65.	discussion group members	general sharing of reading progress	student-led discussion, informal talk about books	student-led cooperative frame co-group member
Cameron: (to Julia) I'm 55!	discussion group members	general sharing of reading progress	student-led discussion, informal talk about books	student-led cooperative frame co-group member
Ava: I'm only right here (showed others a page in Ivy and Bean).	slower reader	only descriptor positions her as behind others		competitive frame Insecure decoding register
Anna: (took a look at the page that Ava was showing) (to Ava) We are all passed. Just look… (opened her book)	Strong reader, group leader *Ava positioned as slower, behind			competitive frame confident competitive decoding register
Julia: (to Anna and Ava) Except for the two of us (referred to Cameron). We are both on 55.	co-member	supporting Ava by sharing their reading progress		student-led cooperative frame co-group member
Anna: I'm passed all of you then. I'm passed you, you, and you.	Strong reader, group leader *positioning all behind her			competitive frame confident competitive decoding register
Ava: (to Lindsey) Why am I the slowest? I'm on page 41. They are all 55, 65. Anna: Ha, ha, ha.	slower reader	concerned and asking teacher for approval		competitive frame insecure decoding register

Anna: (to Mary) I'm, I'm on the, I'm... (referred to Ava) She's on... I'm like... (referred to Julia and Cameron) They are both on 55. (looking at the page number of Ava's book) She's on...	Strong reader, group leader *positioning all behind her		competitive frame confident competitive decoding register
Ava: 41 (looks sad and slumps shoulders)	slower reader		competitive frame insecure decoding register
Mary: Ok, before, before we even start talking about where we are at in the book, I wanna make something clear. It's not a race to see how far we can get. Um, it's really about enjoying the book and um learning a little bit about the characters and understanding what's happening.	Teacher identity valuing comprehension *thus devaluing decoding		teacher-directed student roles frame Teacher register
Anna: (to Mary) And the part I get to um... Well since you guys haven't probably got to this point. I um noticed that they end up to be really good friends.	Strong reader (decoder and comprehension), group leader	*References her fast decoding by saying others aren't there yet	competitive frame confident competitive decoder and comprehension

Note. Frames identified in this excerpt: student-led cooperative frame, competitive frame, teacher-directed/student roles frame. Linguistic registers identified in this excerpt: co-group member, confident/competitive decoding register, insecure decoding register, teacher.

Table 2

Christopher's Participation in Read Alouds At the beginning of the Year

Transcription	Identities Signaled	Linguistic Evidence for Descriptions of Identity		
		General support and/or description	Ritualistic Behavior	Coding for frames and registers
Mary: Oh, hurts my heart. I just asked us to (put her finger on her mouth) and to raise your hands. (read) Until he came to a band of javelinas munching on cactus, "Gingerbread!" shouted the javelinas, "Yee-haw!" The Gingerbread Cowboy just laughed and said, "Giddyup, (kids said together with her) giddyup as fast as you can. You can't catch me. I'm the Gingerbread Man!" He galloped past a big prickly cactus and raced away as fast as his boots could carry him. Until he came to a herd of long-horned cattle grazing in a field. "Mmm. No more grass for us." They all cried. "We want gingerbread." But the Gingerbread Cowboy just laughed and said, "Giggyup, (kids said together with her) giddyup as fast as you can. You can't catch me. I'm the Gingerbread Man!"			Read alouds, behavior discipline	teacher-directed/student roles frame, discipline register
Barret: I have a question. (pointed to the picture in the book) The black one kinda looks like he is the one who would eat him. The black one's like kinda being XXX	Sharing his noticing	Sharing meaning making within literature circle	Sharing meaning making within literature circle	Participatory frame, participant register

Mary: He looks like he has really hungry eyes, right, Barret?	Teacher who accepts to the student's contribution to the whole group conversation, positions Barret as a strong reader (comprehension)	Agreeing Barret's meaning making	Participatory frame, participant register
(Several students talked at the same time.)			
Mary: We can't hear your thinking. Ah, Christopher, ah, Christopher raised his hand. Thank you.	Teacher who decides whose turn to speak		Teacher-directed/student roles frame, discipline register
Barret: I think that's what...			Participatory frame, participant register
Mary: Oh, it's now Christopher's turn.	Teacher who decides whose turn to speak		Teacher-directed/student roles frame, discipline register
Christopher: Our, um, XX, our, um... Javelinas pack hunters a community like, lots of XXX		Sharing a connection	Participatory frame, participant register
Mary: They sort of do. They work together, right?	Teacher who accepts the student's contribution, positions Christopher as a strong reader (comprehension)	Agreeing/Rephrasing Christopher's meaning making	Participatory frame, participant register
Christopher: Yeah.			
Mary: And they use special sounds to hunt and work together.	positions Christopher as a strong reader (comprehension)	Building on Christopher's contribution	Participatory frame, participant register
Christopher: Yeah.			

Mary: Yeah. Good. Alright, I'm moving on. (read) Until he met a...
Note. Frames identified in this excerpt: teacher-directed/student roles frame, participatory frame. Linguistic registers identified in this excerpt: discipline register, participant register.

Table 3

Ritualistic behavior: discussion group, informal talk about books: Anna as a Strong Reader Who Evaluates a Book

Transcription	Identities signaled	Linguistic Evidence for Descriptions of Identity		
		General support and/or description	Ritualistic Behavior	Coding for frames and register
Mary: Does anybody know what your books are missing?			Comprehension documenting stickies	Cooperative frame, sharing register
Anna: Stickies?			Comprehension documenting stickies	
Valentina: I have one. I have two.			Comprehension documenting stickies Discussion	Cooperative frame, sharing register
Mary: You have two? They're hiding? Can you share them with us?			Comprehension documenting stickies Discussion	Cooperative frame, sharing register
Anna: I feel like this book is not really a sticky book.	A strong reader who gets to decide if a book is sticky-worthy	Going against expectations of documenting comprehension and inferences	Comprehension documenting stickies Discussion with challenge	Cooperative frame, sharing register

Mary: Why not?			Comprehension documenting stickies Discussion	Cooperative frame, sharing register
Anna: Cuz you can't really get the feeling out of some of the pages.	A strong reader who gets to decide if a book is sticky-worthy	"You can't"	Comprehension documenting Discussion with challenge stickies	Cooperative frame, sharing register
Valentina: (showed a picture in the book) You can because you could tell they're happy.	A strong reader who reads the picture		Comprehension documenting stickies Discussion with challenge	Cooperative frame, sharing register
Mary: You can tell by the face?			Discussion	Cooperative frame, sharing register
Valentina: Yeah.			Discussion	
Mary: Listen, you can tell by the words, too.	Positions Valentina as a less competent reader who needs to be reminded to read the words		Read the words	*Teacher-directed student roles frame, requiring register
Anna: It's not always on other pages in books with Mercy Watson. Well, it's kind of hard to tell if they're happy or sad. Their face is always happy.	A strong reader who makes comparison between books		Talking about connected texts Discussion with challenge	Cooperative frame, sharing register

Mary: That's interesting.	Positions Anna as a strong reader (comprehension)	Appreciating Anna' opinion	Discussion with challenge	Cooperative frame, sharing register
Anna: If you're reading, yes.	A strong reader (comprehension) who read multiple books in a series		Discussion with challenge	Cooperative frame, sharing register
Mary: Yeah, that's an interesting thought.				

Note. Frames identified in this excerpt: teacher-directed/student roles frame, cooperative frame. Linguistic registers identified in this excerpt: sharing register, requiring register.

Table 4

Christopher Co-researching with Mary in Front of the Class

Transcription	Identities signaled	Linguistic Evidence for Descriptions of Identity		
		General support and/or description	Ritualistic Behavior	Coding for frames and registers
Christopher: (read) Caribou love in the arctic and—				the partner talk frame, the modeling frame
Mary: Subarctic.	Positions Christopher as a less competent decoder			the partner talk frame, helping register
Christopher: - sub—				the partner talk frame, the modeling frame
Mary: Arctic regions.	Positions Christopher as a less competent decoder			the partner talk frame, helping register
Christopher: (read) Regions. They are found in the tundra and mountains.				the partner talk frame, the modeling frame
Mary: Stop there. We just answered another big idea (pointed to the big ideas anchor chart next to her), where they live. They live in the arctic, in the tundra, and in the mountain areas. I'm wondering, do you think—are they good mountain climbers?	positions Christopher as a knowledgeable reader, positions herself as Christopher's partner		modeling partner talk	the modeling frame, self-examining/monitoring register; the partner talk frame, sharing register
Unknown student: Maybe.				
(Christopher nodded.)				the partner talk frame, sharing register
Mary: Have you learned that yet, in your research?	Positions Christopher as a competent reader who researches			the modeling frame, the partner talk frame, sharing register

Christopher: No, not yet.	Positions himself as a competent reader who researches		the modeling frame, the partner talk frame, sharing register
Mary: Not yet. I wonder if they're good climbers, like if they live in mountainy areas, if they can climb mountains.	Positions herself as Christopher's partner		the modeling frame, the partner talk frame, sharing register
Jordan: But if they…			
Mary: (to Jordan) Oh, it's not your turn. It's our turn.	Positions herself as a teacher who has authority		the modeling frame, discipline register
Christopher: (to Mary) They would have to, otherwise they would be falling off. Sometimes, just like goats, sometimes they just, while they're climbing the mountain, there's a special place where they rest. It's a giant rock that comes out of the mountain, and they just stand there.	Positions himself as a knowledgeable reader	contributing his background knowledge	the partner talk frame, sharing register
Mary: You know what? You know what that reminds me of, too, when you said goat? The hooves on a goat, right? I bet, does a caribou have hooves, like a goat, those hard hooves that might be able to help them climb?	positions Christopher as a competent reader	valuing what he contributes to the conversation	the partner talk frame, the modeling frame, sharing register
Christopher: Uh-huh.			the partner talk frame, the modeling frame, sharing register
Evan: And their horns XXX			

Mary: (to Evan) Wait a second, our turn. Would you stop for a second? Raise your hand for a wow move. What did you notice Christopher and I doing? Raise your hand. (Some students raised up their hands) What were we doing? He was an awesome partner. Raise your hand. This is for a wow move. What did you see us doing that good partners do? (whispered to Christopher) Who do you think we should call on?	Positions Christopher as "an awesome partner"	seeking students' evaluation	the modeling frame, teacher-led cooperative frame, evaluating register
Christopher: William.			the modeling frame, inviting register
William L: Using your brain.	Positions both Mary and Christopher as competent readers		the modeling frame, evaluating register

Note. Frames identified in this excerpt: partner talk frame, modeling frame, teacher-led cooperative frame. Linguistic registers identified in this excerpt: helping register, self-examining/monitoring register, sharing register, evaluating register, inviting register.