Reading the Script: How Students and Teachers Understand Reading in the Context of a Scripted Intervention Class

Hope Smith Davis
Indiana University South Bend

Previous research has suggested that teachers’ conceptions of reading and the tools they use for instruction have an impact on their students’ beliefs about reading; accordingly, scripted reading programs may also influence students’ beliefs about reading. Building upon previous findings about students’ conceptions of reading, this article provides data from two separate ethnographic studies set in middle and secondary schools wherein scripted reading interventions were the basis of the curriculum. Data from the first study were gathered through four months of classroom observations and interviews with four ninth-grade students and two teachers participating in a scripted reading class. Data from the second study were gathered over a separate four-month period. Four teachers participated in individual interviews and 15 students in grades 9-12 participated in both focus group discussions and individual interviews. Findings indicate that generally the students described and defined reading in ways consistent with the events and activities given priority in the scripted reading classes. Teachers in both studies described reading as a transactional event for themselves, but a transmission event for their students. Instruction in the classes generally reflected the transmission model, with little opportunity for advanced reading processes or authentic student transaction with text.

Current national educational policies mandate accountability for student achievement, and accountability is frequently defined in relation to scores on state-level standardized tests. As a result, instructional practices in many content areas have been heavily influenced by the topics and structure of the mandated examinations. The reading field is no exception to this current instructional phenomenon. In recent years, textbook manufacturers and program publishers have answered the call for aid in improving student reading achievement by providing a variety of pre-packaged, and often explicitly scripted, intervention programs to educators. With a multitude of programs offering to be comprehensive solutions and virtual panaceas for what are viewed as student reading ills, a question for researchers in the educational community becomes, what is the impact on students’ conceptions of reading when scripted programs are used? Educators need to know what is gained and what is potentially lost through the use of a pre-packaged instructional program, and how use of the program may impact their students’ conceptions of reading and learning in general.
Research on Programmatic Reading Interventions

While scripted reading interventions have been available for many years, increased national attention to struggling adolescent readers since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2002) has led to an influx of programmatic, often scripted, reading intervention programs being marketed toward students who read below expected levels at the middle and secondary levels. For example, in 2007, Deshler, Palinscar, Biancarosa, and Nair published a guide to over 40 programmatic interventions (including scripted programs) for adolescents who struggle with reading. However, most available research on scripted reading interventions has tended to focus on elementary-aged readers, and on quantifiable skills-based assessments (e.g., Jones, Staats, Bowling, Bikel, Cunningham, & Cadle, 2004; Munoz & Dossett, 2004; Pikulski, 1994; Ross & Smith, 1994).

Research on the impact of programmatic reading interventions for older students has begun to emerge recently, albeit in smaller quantities (e.g., Bradford, Shippen, Alberto, Houchins, & Flores, 2006; Hasselbring & Goin, 2004; Topping & Paul, 1999; Tunmer, Chapman, Greaney & Prochnow, 2002), but, again, the focus has been on the acquisition of reading skills. In addition, much of the research on programmatic reading interventions available for older readers is often evaluative, commissioned by the program publishers, or published in organizational reports (Slavin, Chung, Groff & Lake, 2008). While a few studies on scripted interventions have included surveys of student, teacher, and parent attitudes (Munoz & Dossett, 2004; Ross & Smith, 1994), examinations of scripted interventions from a sociocultural perspective to determine if or how the use of these tools impacts the ways participants view learning or content are even more difficult to find.

Scripted Interventions

From a constructivist perspective (Vygotsky, 1978; Wertsch, 1998), our knowledge of the world shapes and is shaped by our interactions with others and with the tools we use. Scripted reading interventions are instructional tools, defined here as pre-packaged, publisher-designed curricula that provide explicit instructions for teacher and student behaviors and responses. Additionally, scripting implies that the program follows a specifically-paced, externally-monitored format (P.D. Pearson, personal communication, May 21, 2007) that allows for little, if any, modification or deviation by classroom teachers outside the pre-set parameters of the program design. All curricular materials—including passages for reading, discussion topics, questions and expected responses, and assessments—are provided by the publishers, and the teachers are given guides, often with explicit scripts to read during instruction, that indicate which lessons are taught and how to assess student progress through the program. It is important to note that not all pre-packaged programs fit this definition for scripted. For example, Accelerated Reader (Renaissance Learning) is a pre-packaged program present in many school districts; however, as it does not use a program pacing guide, nor are there explicit guides for instruction, it would not be included in a list of scripted interventions as defined in this article.

Programs fitting the definition of “scripted” come in a variety of formats, targeting different skills. Some, like, Corrective Reading (SRA McGraw-Hill) advertise themselves as scripted, while others with designs meeting the scripted criteria, like Rewards Plus (Sopris West) and Read 180 (Scholastic), do not. Corrective Reading, Rewards Plus, and Read 180 are the three scripted reading intervention programs that were used in the classrooms in the studies.
described below. Read 180 is a comprehensive program that provides texts and opportunities for independent reading, small- and large-group discussion, workbooks and videos, and individualized, computer-based instruction. Skills taught include word work, decoding, vocabulary acquisition, spelling, and comprehension. Corrective Reading offers multiple workbooks for classroom use, depending on student tested reading levels, focusing on decoding and comprehension skills (Englemann, Hanner, & Johnson, 1999). Rewards Plus is the second component of a program that begins with structural analysis of multi-syllabic words and then shifts to more in-depth comprehension, writing, and text analysis lessons. Rewards Plus is a supplemental program that builds on a previously learned method for structural analysis of multisyllabic words, integrating this process with content-based texts and activities.

Reading, Readers, and Instruction

Students who understand reading as a meaning-making process (Johns, 1974), are more likely to be effective readers, and students who see themselves as effective readers are more likely to read, thus improving their skills (Allington, 2006). Additionally, Schraw and Bruning (1996) found that readers who approach texts from a transactional (Rosenblatt, 1994) perspective, meaning that they actively connect with the text to make meaning, tend to read more efficiently, both in terms of comprehension as well as engagement.

Based on the understanding that reading is making meaning from text, a guiding premise for any reading intervention program should be to help students improve their ability to construct meaning and to metacognitively monitor their own reading processes (see Baker & Brown, 1984). In order for this goal to be accomplished, each of the instructional strategies used in that program must reflect this metacognitive, meaning-making perspective. Isolated instruction in any specific skill that is recognized as a component part of reading may lead to improved production of that skill, but, without an integrated approach to reading as a transactional (Rosenblatt, 1994), social, psychological, and linguistic process (Goodman, 1994), at best, instruction will only result in improved ability for a student to reproduce an isolated skill.

Citing Stanovich’s (1986) Matthew effect, Allington (2006) suggested that the more students read, the more effective they become as readers. The less they read, the less effective they become. Attitude, motivation, and self-perception all contribute to how much time students spend reading. Unfortunately, students’ attitudes toward reading tend to decrease over time (Brown & Wigfield, 1999; McKenna, Kear, & Elsworth, 1995; Sperling & Head, 2002), which may be influenced by their perceptions of themselves as readers (Conlon, Zimmer-Gembeck, Creed, & Tucker, 2006; Pflaum & Bishop, 2004). The result of less time spent reading, for some students, means that the gap between them and their peers widens. Encouragingly, research has shown that student self-perceptions as readers and their motivation to read can be positively influenced by effective teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1999) and engaging classroom instructional practices (Conlon et al., 2006; Cosgrove, 2003; Sweet, Guthrie, & Ng, 1998). Reflexively, the teachers’ own conceptions of instruction can be influenced by the tools they use in their classrooms (Richards, 2001; Valencia, Place, Martin, & Grossman, 2006).

Research Questions

Several of the findings from the studies cited above influenced the research described in this article. The most salient is that research has established a direct link between students’
conceptions of reading, how students see themselves as readers, and reading performance. Teachers’ perceptions of reading and of their students as readers are shown to be important factors in how students think about reading and how they view themselves as readers; these teachers’ perceptions of students and instruction may be influenced by the tools they use in the classroom. As a result, teacher perceptions are, in part, shaped by the instructional tools they use; students’ conceptions are, in part, shaped by their teachers’ perceptions; and student reading performance is impacted by all three. Thus, the goal of the two studies described in the following sections was to uncover how students and teachers in scripted reading intervention classes understood reading, and to determine if there was any correspondence between the activities emphasized in the scripted interventions and the conceptions about reading that were held by the participants. Specifically, research questions driving both of these studies were as follows:

1. How was reading understood by the students and teachers who used scripted reading interventions in secondary classes?
2. Did the reading events in a scripted reading intervention class align with the conceptions of reading held by the participants?

Methods

The data and findings in this article are combined from two different ethnographic studies conducted in six secondary scripted reading intervention classrooms in the suburbs of a large Midwestern city between 2006 and 2008. Students in both studies were placed in the reading intervention classes following standardized assessments that identified them as reading two or more years below grade level.

Context for Study One

Site and Participants. Study One was undertaken over a period of four months during the spring of 2007, in a single ninth-grade classroom using the scripted intervention program Read 180 (Scholastic, Inc.). The school was a large suburban high school within a major metropolitan area in the Midwest. Students enrolled in the Read 180 class were typically freshmen, though occasionally sophomores were also registered, who read below grade level and who had positive behavior records. Students who were seen as behavior problems, called “thugs and slugs” were not permitted to enroll, due to the expensive computer equipment and classroom furnishings required by the program publishers for optimal impact. Students who had an excessive number of behavior referrals, determined by the school administration, were enrolled in a separate English/Language Arts class, that followed a more traditional secondary reading and writing curriculum. Four female ninth-grade students and both of the two teachers assigned to the class agreed to participate in the study. As with all of the students enrolled in the Read 180 classes at this site, the participants each read at least two years below grade level. Read 180 served as the only English/Language Arts course for the students for the duration of the school year.

Read 180. Read 180 is a comprehensive reading intervention program that is designed for 90-minute blocks of time. Within each block of time, the whole class meets for the first ten minutes, then for the next hour students rotate in small groups through three different 20-minute stations. One station is designed for small group instruction with the classroom teacher wherein the program workbook is used. The workbook consists of different types of short texts (e.g., expository, narrative, poetry) organized thematically, with sections for word work,
implementation of specific reading strategies (eg. looking back in the text, making predictions), and comprehension questions.

At a second station, students self-select tradebooks within their reading level to read independently. After students complete a text, they are able to take a computerized test for comprehension, and to complete a project (e.g., poster) on the book prior to beginning a new one. The third station is for individualized, computer-based instruction wherein the students have the option to work on vocabulary knowledge, spelling, comprehension, or fluency. As students show progress in the programs, the computer adjusts the difficulty level, though teachers have the ability to override this feature. The final 10 minutes of the class are dedicated to whole-group wrap up. The program meets the definition of scripted because of the explicit pacing required both during each individual class session as well as per unit. Additionally, the program workbook provides an explicit script to the instructors for wording used during instruction and student responses. Almost all materials, including supplemental materials, are provided by the publisher, and, as the teachers both indicated during interviews, they were discouraged from going “off model” by both program publishers and the school administration. As one teacher put it “We are following a script.”

Instruction for in the Read 180 class was shared by two teachers who were each in their fourth year of teaching at the time of the study. One teacher was certified in English/Language Arts with a background in humanities. The other teacher was certified in Special Education. The teachers alternated leading the class each day. The leader initiated both the whole-class and small-group discussions, while the other circled the room working with students independently, completed reports, graded papers, and/or modeled reading in the independent reading section of the classroom. The classroom furnishings and organization were arranged according to the program publisher’s specifications. Independent reading was completed in a back-corner section of the room with multiple soft-seated chairs to facilitate comfort. A bank of computer stations lined the wall opposite the reading corner, and a U-shaped table for small group work was at the front of the room. Traditional desk/chair combinations for whole-class discussion were in the center.

In addition to the Read 180 course observed in Study One, a second team of teachers (not observed in this research) offered a second section of the class. The four Read 180 teachers divided planning for both sections by month, with each teacher planning for one week, then following the plans established by the other teachers for the remaining three. The teachers in the observed classes occasionally made significant deviations from the program script by incorporating longer in-class writing assignments or by watching a video not supplied by the publisher. However, during the observation year, it was noted that student reading levels did not improve as much as the reading levels of the students in the previous year. The teachers indicated that the students who took the course during the second year of implementation started with higher levels of reading than their peers in the previous year, but the smaller increase in scores the second year was attributed to the writing modifications developed by the teachers. As a result, the teachers were considering removing the extended writing assignments during the third year. Data in this study were only gathered during the second year of implementation.

Data Collection for Study One. Field notes and classroom artifacts were gathered during 27 days of observation in the Read 180 class over a period of three months in the spring of the 2006-2007 school year. Participants took part in individual, semi-structured interviews after the conclusion of the observation period. Semi-structured interview questions were derived from
Spradley’s (1980) grand-tour and mini-tour question format, with preliminary analysis of the observation data guiding the initial question development (see Appendix for sample questions).

Context for Study Two

Site and Participants. Data from Study Two were gathered over a four-month period in the spring of 2008, at a single, small, combined junior high/ high school, also in the suburbs of a major metropolitan area in the Midwest. Observations were conducted in four classrooms. Two used the Corrective Reading Program (SRA/McGraw Hill) and were generally for students in grades 7-9 who were reading at least three years below grade level; however, one research participant from this group was in Grade 10. The remaining two classes used Rewards Plus (Sopris West) and were designed for students in grades 9-12, reading at least three years below level. Descriptions of the teachers and students participating in the study are provided in the sections that follow.

Corrective Reading Program. The Corrective Reading Program contains multiple levels that are geared toward decoding, fluency, and comprehension. It was designed for students in grades 3-12, and the version that was used in the two classes in Study Two focused on explicit word-level decoding and phonics-based activities, with some activities designed to build comprehension and fluency. Classroom practices consisted of the teacher reading a list of phonetically-related, single-syllable words from the workbook individually, with students repeating the words after the teacher. When students miscued on a word, the class started the list from the beginning until every word was pronounced correctly. The excerpt from the field notes below provides an example of a typical word work exercise in the program, wherein the teacher and students read a list of words that are working on the /a/ sound.

Teacher: What word?
Students: Began.
Teacher: What word?
Students: Happened.
Teacher: What word?
Students: Very.
Teacher: What word?
Students: Sandy.
[Teacher has students read the list again.]
Teacher: What word?
Students: Began.
[Some students miscue. Teacher has students read the list again.]
Teacher: What word?
Students: Began.
Teacher [to student who is reading more quickly than others]: Wait for them. I want you to say it, but I want you to wait…you’re going to be their parrot.

Other activities included the teacher reading passages from the text, stopping to ask the provided comprehension questions periodically, round-robin reading from the students, timed reading, and word work. Of the three programs in the study, Corrective Reading was the most scripted, as the teachers were given explicit directions and supplied with both language and gestures to use during instruction. The publishers and school administrators expected the classes to complete
one lesson each day and then move on to the next on the following day, regardless of whether all of the activities in the initial lesson had been completed.

The Corrective Reading classes were relatively small with fewer than 10 students participating in each section. Student reading levels ranged from third through sixth grade, and the classes were generally available for students in grades 7-9, though one of the teachers indicated that older students also participated in the class if their reading abilities were in the grade 3-6 range. One of the Corrective Reading teachers had taught for over 30 years, mostly in special education, and the other, who was the English department chair, held a communications certification, and had taught in the district for about eight years. Planning for the course followed the program design, and each day a new lesson was implemented. Deviations from the script were minimal, mainly in the form of teacher modifications of the actual words indicated in the script. For example, when asked about modifications to the program, the department chair indicated that she changed from saying Next word? as directed in the script to saying Next? instead when cueing students to read from supplied word lists. She said she did this in the interest of time.

Rewards Plus Program. Unlike Corrective Reading or Read 180, the Rewards Plus program was not designed as a comprehensive program, but as a supplemental tool, used in this setting as a break from more traditional novel study activities. During a five-week session in the fall students learned a basic strategy for decoding multisyllabic words using the Rewards program. Throughout the rest of the term, students read and discussed novels that were not part of the scripted intervention. Four months later, during the spring semester, students revisited the strategy in a second component of the Rewards program, called Rewards Plus. In Rewards Plus, students applied the structural analysis strategy to different passages related to science content. Class sessions included organizing text-based readings using graphic organizers, word work, assessments of orthographic knowledge based on word families, timed reading, and responses to comprehension questions.

While the Rewards Plus program also provided opportunities for students to write extended responses to texts read, these activities were omitted during implementation at the request of the administration. The department chair, also a teacher participating in the study, said that the junior high/senior high was given the Rewards Plus program after the elementary schools, which had previously used it, moved on to a new program. She explained “The research, I don’t actually have the research, or know the research, but, when [it was originally selected, the research] supported that it needs to be done 20 lessons, back-to-back.” As a result, lessons that too much time to complete were omitted.

Students enrolled in the Rewards Plus Program classes ranged from grades 9-12, and had tested reading levels between two and three years below grade level. One of the teachers using the program had spent over 30 years in education or education related fields including school administration, and the other was new to the combined junior high/high school, though she was in her 28th year of teaching. Prior to joining the junior high/high school staff, she was the intervention specialist at an elementary school in the same district. Deviations from the Rewards Plus program in both classes varied by teacher, though most deviations were minimal, and were generally based on linguistic choices made by the teacher as she read from the textbook script.

Data Collection for Study Two. Observations were conducted in Corrective Reading Class 1 (CRC1) for five days, Corrective Reading Class 2 (CRC2) for eight days, Rewards Plus Class 1 (RPC 1) for seven days, and Rewards Plus Class 2 (RPC 2) for four days. Combined, the Corrective Reading classes were observed for a total of 13 days, and the Rewards Plus classes
were observed for 11, for a total of 24 observation days at the site. Fifteen students (seven from the Corrective Reading classes and eight from the Rewards Plus classes) and all four of the classroom teachers agreed to participate in individual structured interviews. Additionally, each student participating in the second study also participated in one of four focus group discussions. Focus groups were made up of students who were using the same program, though not necessarily enrolled in the same course, based on their availability during the focus group session times offered. The interviews for Study Two followed the same format for Study One, and the questions asked were derived from preliminary analysis of the observation data, as well as findings from Study One. The focus group sessions, used only in Study Two, also used themes from preliminary analysis for question generation (See appendix for examples).

Data Analysis

Data from Study One and Study Two were analyzed using Spradley’s (1980) thematic analysis procedures. Data were initially coded by emergent themes that were then collapsed into larger domains. The codes present in each thematic domain underwent a taxonomic analysis in order to better understand relationships between the concepts and ideas represented. In the examples provided below, all names are pseudonyms.

Sample Analysis from Study One. During her interview, Xena, a ninth-grade student in the Read 180 class, described her reading ability:

I think that I’m a good reader, like, as far as you telling me to read something. I’m pretty good at reading, like big words and stuff. . . We may be reading, like, in the book or something and some kids, they’ll say they can’t, like, say a word that I look at and I’m like ‘that’s easy’ . . . It’s pretty easy for me to just read . . . I don’t think I’m a bad reader at all, ‘cause I am a good reader.

Xena’s description of reading was coded as decoding, as the most significant aspect of reading that she mentions in the quote is pronouncing “big words.” This conception of reading became an important feature to note, as later in the interview Xena explained that the reason she was in the intervention class was because she had a “comprehension skills problem” but she maintained she was a “good reader” because she could pronounce large words.

Codes such as this one indicating student definitions of reading, were collapsed into the domain of student reading conceptions. The data in this domain were then examined in relation to the data in the domain teacher reading conceptions to determine correspondence and/or connections between student and teacher conceptions of reading. Data in these domains were also examined in relation to a series of codes included in the classroom events domain to determine if patterns could be found between activities in the class and themes relating to student/teacher conceptions of reading.

In the following example that was coded both as small group activity and teacher directs student writing under the classroom events domain, students were completing word work in small groups with the teacher:

Teacher: What’s the target word?
Student 1: Demonstration.
Teacher: Demonstration. Write that down. Anyone not heard that word before?
[A student makes a connection to science class. The teacher explains what a scientific demonstration is.]
Teacher: In this context, what does demonstration mean? It’s an act or protest or a march. [A student repeats this definition.]
Teacher: Write this down

Data from the classroom events domain were then examined for patterns among and between events, for example, how and in what ways reading strategies were modeled and practiced for students, and then compared to student and teacher conceptualizations of reading as coded through the process shown with the sample from Xena, above.

Sample Analysis from Study Two. In Study Two, data were again coded based on emergent themes, as well as themes determined during the analysis of the data from Study One. Because the attributes of the students in Study Two varied more than the students in Study Two, (for example, the student participants did not all have the same teacher, use the same program, or attend the same grade), data from Study Two were analyzed as a whole (in other words, how all the students individually defined reading) and also organized and analyzed based on participant attributes (for example, how the students in the Corrective Reading Class One defined reading versus how students in Corrective Reading Class Two defined reading) in order to determine if there were patterns of response based on participant role.

To demonstrate how coding and analysis were done, the following statements from participants in Study Two were coded as Student descriptions of effective readers:
Boots: “You gotta know how to sound out the sounds, and how to read anything. Know how to comprehend anything you read.”
Maria: “[Effective readers] will stop. Like my cousin. She read fast. . . When she get stuck on a word she’ll write down on a piece of paper and split it up into syllables, and then she’ll sound the first one out and then keep going, and then put them all together and she’ll get the word. . . [Effective readers] don’t miss none of the words.”
Bob: “Learn all the basic words in certain things you read [to be effective].”
Derrick: “I think it takes a little bit of knowledge, you know. Sometimes, to be an effective reader, you gotta really be dedicated to it. . . Everybody say they wanna read, but you really gotta dig down and read through to be an effective reader. You gotta understand your words. You gotta know how to break it down. You gotta know what it mean. You gotta know how to break it down. You gotta know what it mean.”
Amy: “What I think is easy for a reader to understand something is for you to imagine it while you go along. Like imagine the person if they have curly hair. Imagine the sceneries, stuff like that.”
Jimmerton: “[My dad] just knows, like, a lot of words and stuff like that. Like, I’ll ask him how to spell a word and he’ll tell me, or, like, what it means.”

In addition to coding the student statements above as student descriptions of effective readers, the statements by Boots and Bob were coded as both comprehension and decoding. Derrick’s, and Jimmerton’s statements were coded as decoding, while Maria’s was coded under fluency. Amy’s was coded as visualization. Student conceptions of reading were then compared to the teachers’ conceptions of reading and data from classroom observations to determine if there were connections or patterns in a process similar to the analysis used for Study One.

Because the participants in Study Two were enrolled in four different classes using two different programs, an additional level of analysis was necessary. For example, Boots and Maria were in separate Corrective Reading classes, while Amy, Bob, and Derrick were in one section of Rewards Plus and Jimmerton was in the other. Analysis of the data needed to examine if and
how conceptions and events crossed these classes, or if the student and teacher conceptions were limited based on the section and or course in which they were enrolled.

As a result, once the thematic codes and domains were determined, taxonomic and hierarchical analyses were conducted to examine types of events and conceptions based on students and teachers as whole groups and disaggregated based on similar traits relevant to the research questions and data collection procedures. Event codes and domains were extracted and examined based on each specific scripted program. For example, conceptions of reading were grouped based on program, grade level, and specific section to look for patterns across and within specific groupings. Coded statements from each of the participants were also examined in relation to the data collection process to look for consistency. For example, data from Derrick coded as comprehension were grouped based on when the statements were made – during individual interviews, as data from field notes from classroom discussions, or during the focus group session to see if the setting during which the data were collected may have influenced his responses.

Limitations

Several limitations to these studies and this report are important to note. The first is that the data were collected during two separate studies. While similar in design and methodology, in some cases different data collection and analysis methods were used, making an across the board comparison difficult. For example, Study Two was informed by the findings of Study One. As a result of what was learned in the initial study, adjustments were made in the design of the second, including participation of more students and the use of focus groups in addition to the individual interviews. Had focus groups been used in Study One, additional data would have been available for analysis that may have impacted the ultimate findings. Another limitation of the study was the time spent in observing the classes in Study Two. Due to the school schedule, all four of the classes were offered at the same time each day, so with a single researcher observing, the classes, it was not possible to be in more than one class at a time. Additionally, Study Two was originally designed to only investigate the Corrective Reading classes, however, once on site, the possibility of also observing the Rewards Plus classes became available. As Rewards plus was only taught for a period of 5 weeks, it was only possible to observe a week of class sessions for each section before the instruction ended. More time in each of the classes may, again, have yielded more data to support or counter the findings presented here.

Findings

The common research questions in each of the two studies sought to determine what conceptions students and teachers participating in scripted reading intervention courses held, and if the practices in the classes were consistent with those conceptions. Analysis of the data indicated that students from both studies generally held conceptions of reading that were consistent with the skills and events given priority in the scripted intervention programs. In other words, in classes that used programs that emphasized basic-level skills over meaning-making activities, most often the students defined reading in relation to the same basic skills emphasized in class, rather than meaning-making. This cannot imply causality, as neither the purpose nor the design of the study was to determine cause/effect relationships. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the students’ conceptions, despite undertaking classes dedicated toward improving
reading abilities, were reflective of the definitions held by ineffective readers in Johns’ (1974) classic study. In Johns’ research, students who were ineffective readers (identified as reading at a year or more below grade level) defined reading through the basic skills required, with making meaning largely absent from their descriptions, while the majority of his participants who read a year or more above grade-level described reading as meaning-making process.

Teachers in the study were found to make a distinction between their own, personal reading practices and their conceptions of reading for their students. Whereas the teachers described reading for themselves as escapist, pleasurable, and/or knowledge-seeking activity, for their students they conceptualized reading in relation to basic skills that needed to be mastered. Events given priority in the classes were reflective of this distinction, with the bulk of the activities in the scripted programs focusing on basic skills.

**Student conceptions of reading: Corrective Reading.** Students in both Corrective Reading classes tended to limit their descriptions of reading to basic-level skills. For example, Maria, a 7th grader in Corrective Reading explained that good readers “don’t miss none of the words,” and Lee, a 9th grader in the same class, confused decoding with vocabulary acquisition, indicating “if you can figure out [a] word, then, later on, you know what that word means.” When their descriptions were coded and compared to events given priority in the Corrective Reading classes, a connection between activities and perceptions was seen. As implemented at the site, the program focused most heavily on phonics work and fluency, and students often described reading as being able to decode with speed and accuracy.

The Corrective Reading students’ conceptions of reading tended to reflect their teachers’ views when it came to their goals for reading instruction. For example, Maria’s Corrective Reading teacher explained that in order to teach students to read, first they must learn to decode. For her, the program provided the opportunity to do this. “Corrective Reading is just getting them to the point where they can read the material. . .I’m not, at this point as concerned about comprehension,” she explained. Analysis of the data coded for events reflected these priorities in the Corrective Reading classes.

**Student conceptions of reading: Read 180.** For the students in Read 180, reading was defined more broadly, often in relation to four of five key areas for reading instruction, as determined by the National Reading Panel report (NCHID, 2000): phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and, to a lesser extent, comprehension, and highlighted in the program itself. While able to describe several of the basic skills associated with reading, however, the students in the Read 180 study did not describe reading as an integrated process with meaning-making at the core of the purpose for reading. Rather, they seemed to describe the basic skills, including comprehension, as equal facets. In other words, decoding and vocabulary acquisition were not necessary for comprehension, but that decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension were separate and distinct skills to be learned, as indicated by Xena’s example in the section above.

Xena was labeled as a struggling reader and had been placed in the intervention course because her reading was below grade level; however, like the students in John’s (1974) classic study, she failed to see that “comprehension” was the purpose of reading and that it is impossible to be an effective reader without making meaning from the text.

Like Xena, Keisha, another student in the Read 180 class, also believed that being a “good” reader meant knowing how to decode “big words.” Consequently, Keisha believed she was an effective reader when she could sound out long words, even when she didn’t understand the texts. Similarly, another student in the Read 180 class, Hippo, believed that she was an effective reader because she read “fast.” Hippo equated speed with strong reading, and, though
again she had difficulty comprehending texts, she became frustrated with the class and the program because her conceptualization of reading was based on a loose interpretation of fluency, and not making meaning.

These skills-based conceptions of reading coincided with the events given priority in the implementation of the program at this school site. As shown in the analysis section, frequently throughout the study the Read 180 classroom teachers asked students questions and then either provided them with the answer, or affirmed or disconfirmed their answers and continued with the lesson, without further discussion. While the program was designed to include questions for critical thought and connections to the text, the pacing of the program itself, and the expected student responses as provided in the teacher’s edition of the text, limited thoughtful discussions or the social construction of ideas. The result was an emphasis on decoding words, reading fluency (determined through speed of reading), and comprehension as determined through students’ ability to supply answers to text-based questions matching responses provided in the teacher’s edition. When students were asked to respond to a more critical or thought-provoking question, little to no conversation or discussion followed. Metacognitive discussions about making personal connections to texts, monitoring for comprehension, other advanced reading processes, or specific reading strategies were also limited.

**Student conceptions of reading: Rewards Plus.** During interviews, the students enrolled in the Rewards Plus program seemed to see reading as a meaning-making activity on a broader level than those enrolled in Corrective Reading or Read 180 classes. Boots was the only student in the Corrective Reading classes to discuss reading as meaning-making process beyond the word level, and there were no students from Read 180 who did so. Of the Rewards Plus students, the data show that each one provided some form of meaning-making as part of his/her understanding of reading at some point during either the individual or focus group interviews. Notably, however, the students seemed to have different conceptions of the term ‘comprehension’ itself, and these seemed to correspond to the events given priority in the class and by their teachers.

For example, in the sample data above, Bob’s description of effective readers’ strategies was based on knowledge at the word level, however Derrick discussed both word and world knowledge as part of comprehension throughout his interview. Their Rewards Plus teacher discussed meaning making as the purpose for reading during formal and informal interviews. “What’s the point of decoding the words if you don’t know what they mean?” In the final analysis, the student conceptions of reading each showed various aspects of the activities either recorded during observations, or shared by the teacher during her interview.

A second Rewards Plus teacher explained that her goal for students in the class was for them to “be able to pick up a book and enjoy it because they have become better readers, stronger readers. . . This way they don’t have to spend quite so much time and effort sounding out these words,” however the emphasis, as observed, in class was more on decoding skills, and meaning at the word level. For her, effective reading was a linear process that began with understanding the words and moved toward comprehension at the passage and personal level. Jimmerton, a member this Rewards Plus class, consistently described reading as knowledge at the word level, again reflective of both activities in his section of the class and his teachers’ perspective on student reading. Amy, a transfer student, however, was an outlier here. Her conception of reading was by far the most reflective of Rosenblatt’s (1994) transaction with text. Amy talked frequently about personal connections with the text, making predictions, and other advanced reading processes, as well as being able to be “lost in the book,” an experience several
of her peers indicated they wished they could have, but felt like they didn’t know how to achieve. Though the Rewards Plus program itself did provide opportunities for practice with higher-order reading strategies, including analysis, summarization, and evaluation (see Fountas & Pinnell, 2001), many of these lessons were not implemented at the study site due to time constraints and departmental directives.

Unlike the other two programs observed, Rewards Plus did not mandate the entire course. For the students in the Rewards Plus classes, the scripted intervention was only part of a larger curriculum wherein the teacher selected tradebooks for the students to read and discuss during 30 of the 40 weeks of the school year. This is an important differentiation to note between this class and the other two discussed in this article. Aside from the two five-week periods when Rewards Plus, and its precursor, Rewards, were implemented, the remainder of instruction was based on reading, discussing, and writing about young adult novels using teacher-designed curricula and lessons; thus student conceptualizations of reading in the Rewards Plus classes may still have aligned with the content of the course, however only the scripted intervention portion of the course was observed for this study, so correspondence between the novel studies instruction and student conceptions of reading can only be speculated based on findings of previous research relating to literature-based classroom and student conceptions of reading (Allington, 2006; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Cosgrove, 2003; Pflaum & Bishop, 2004; Pitcher, Albright, DeLaney, Walker, SeunarineSingh, Mogge, et al., 2007; Sweet, Guthrie, & Ng, 1998)

Another indicator of a distinction between literature-based instruction and the scripted intervention in the Rewards Plus classes may be found in that the student participants seemed to make a clear distinction between self-selected reading, often in the form of novels, but also magazines and online texts, and reading as instructed in school. When defining reading in relation to the scripted intervention program, six of the eight students enrolled in the Rewards Plus classes described reading as pronouncing and being able to break down words, understanding them at the word level. However, each of these students, when talking about their own reading experiences, also included descriptions of transacting with the text; for example, Chantée reported she was able to get “lost” in a book. Amy articulated the constructive meaning-making involved in reading by saying, “Many people get different stuff about the things you read, but not everybody gets the same thing.” and for Derrick, reading was a social obligation, saying “What would the world come to if people don’t read? . . . We would be running around like cave men . . . Reading is, like, to get us smarter, wiser, and to, like set us up for the future.”

Based on their global descriptions of reading, these students in the Rewards Plus classes came much closer to seeing reading as a meaning-making activity than their counterparts in the Corrective Reading and Read 180 classes. Several of them expressed an interest in learning to transact with texts more fully, yet the instruction provided to them through the scripted reading intervention did not explicitly help them learn to do so. This finding is significant because the students’ interest in learning to construct more personal meaning from text was similar to the teachers’ conceptions of reading for themselves (discussed below), but not reflective of what the teachers believed their students needed to learn.

**Teacher conceptions of reading.** Essentially, the teachers in both sites viewed the students’ interest in reading and goals as different from their own. For the teachers, reading was often described as an escape from everyday life, or a way to connect with new knowledge and ideas. However, when they spoke about reading in relation to instruction and their students, they talked about basic skills and a linear approach to acquisition of those skills. For example, one of the Corrective Reading teachers initially defined reading using terms from the National Reading
Panel report (NICHD, 2000): “The ability to add the sounds of letters together to make a word. . .I think you definitely have to understand what you’re reading . . .you have to read it at a fluent pace . . .Decoding. Fluency. I can use all the words: decoding, fluency, comprehension. . .” Indeed, these skills were the ones most emphasized during observations of the scripted intervention classrooms. When describing reading for herself, however, she had a different perspective: “[Reading] relaxes me. It makes me escape.”

While several of the teachers involved in the studies expressed a desire for the students to experience reading transactionally, in the way they themselves did, their instructional practices did not reflect this goal. As the department chair from Study Two said, “As long as you provide the structure for them to get started and learn all the sounds then you provide the structure for them to get the practice . . . They’re only going to get better at it. They can’t get worse.” Inherent in this statement is the assumption that after students can decode words, they will be able to make meaning from the text.

**Implications**

The analysis of the data from the two studies shows that student conceptions of reading in each of the classes observed were consistent with the strategies and skills given priority in the classes. Almost all of the students in both studies described reading in terms of decoding or fluency, but with few exceptions, only those who were in the Rewards Plus program, which was implemented as a break-out curriculum within the context of a year-long novel studies class, shared conceptions of reading that included meaning-making as a purpose for reading.

Because readers who have conceptions of reading that include meaning-making are more likely to be more effective readers (Johns, 1974), and because readers who approach text with a transactional perspective are able to recall more (Schraw & Bruning, 1996), it would seem that instruction for struggling readers should focus on meaning-making and transaction, in addition to shoring up any basic skills necessary. While the design of two of the programs, Read 180 and Rewards Plus, did allow for some constructive exploration, the perception held by teachers and administrators that there was a lack of time to implement these activities fully led them to limit instruction to basic-level skills reflective of their own perspectives on the reading needs of their students.

The teachers involved in the programs saw their students’ needs for reading as different and distinct from their own, and believed that by following the program their students would acquire the necessary skills to eventually be able to transact with texts. However, instruction in such meaning-making transactions was absent from the curricula as designed and implemented.

Finally, the use of the scripted programs in the classrooms seemed to impact the professional involvement of the teachers. Roles traditionally undertaken by the classroom teacher ranging from instructional design and assessment to differentiation of instruction and management of classroom conversations were deferred to the guidelines and parameters set by the programs used. Teachers in the classes were removed from the day-to-day decision-making as they followed plans and used assessments that were not designed based on their individual students’ needs, but on the expectations of a pre-packaged program. Time and perceptions of external reviewers monitoring program fidelity directed which lessons were taught and when, not necessarily the needs or interest of the students.
Conclusion

The pressure to demonstrate performance on state-mandated tests has resulted in significant changes to school curricula. One result of the accountability movement has been the implementation of scripted reading interventions in secondary classrooms, though research on the impact and use of scripted interventions on older readers is largely missing from peer-reviewed literature in the field. This analysis of the data from two ethnographic studies of scripted reading interventions suggests that students who participated in scripted reading intervention classes held conceptions of reading that mirrored the activities and skills given priority in those classes. Moreover, the studies indicated that the teachers viewed their own experiences with reading as distinctly different from their students’; their classroom practices reflected this distinction.
References


Appendix
Sample Interview Questions

Student Questions
Warm up questions:
1. What grade are you in?
2. What do you like about school?
3. Do you enjoy reading?
4. Are you reading anything currently that you can tell me about?

Grand Tour questions:
1. Explain to me, in your own words, the purpose of this class?
2. How is the class set up?
3. What is a typical class period like?
4. Describe a typical student who takes this class.
5. What is reading?

Mini Tour questions:
1. Why are you taking this class?
2. How are the things you do in this class like or unlike other reading/English classes you have taken?
3. Do you know any effective readers?
   a. What does s/he do that makes him/her good at reading?
4. How would you describe yourself as a reader?
5. Can you think of any specific ways this class has affected your reading?
6. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about this class?
7. Please fill in the blank to the following:
   a. Reading is like ______________________ (Please explain)
   b. This class is like ____________________ (Please explain)
   c. The reading program is like ____________ (Please explain)

Teacher Questions
Warm up questions:
1. Provide me a little bit of your background as a teacher. How long have you been teaching?
2. What area(s) is/are you certified in?
3. What is your favorite part about teaching?

Grand Tour questions:
1. What is reading?
2. What is a scripted reading intervention program?
3. Describe the program that is being used in this class.
4. How are students chosen to be in the program?

Mini Tour questions:
1. As the instructor, what is your role in the program?
2. How do you prepare for a lesson in this class?
3. In what ways do you deviate from the program? (or do you deviate?)
4. How does training for the program work?
5. Please fill in the blanks to the following:
   a. Reading is like _______________ (Please explain)
   b. Reading for me is like ___________ (Please explain)
   c. This class is like _______________ (Please explain)
   d. The reading program is like _______ (Please explain)
   e. Teaching in this class is like _______ (Please explain)

Focus Group Discussion Guide
1. Tell me about the program. What do you do in the class?
2. Do you find yourselves using the strategies in other classes, in other reading?
3. What does the program title mean?
4. Do you know anybody who’s a good reader?
   a. What are some of the things that they do that make them good readers?
5. What does it mean to read?
6. Do you enjoy reading?
7. What are your goals for yourselves as readers?
8. Please fill in the following:
   a. Reading is like: ____________________ (Please explain)
   b. The class is like: ____________________ (Please explain)