

Monograph No. 11

**SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND EDUCATION
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES
ST. AUGUSTINE**

**Reading-Challenged Fourth-Formers'
Perspectives on Schooling**

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2009

The ideas and opinions expressed in this work are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the School of Education.

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Published in 2009 by the
School of Education
Faculty of Humanities and Education
The University of the West Indies
St. Augustine
Trinidad

ISBN: 978-976-622-002-0

Printed by the Multimedia Production Centre
School of Education
Faculty of Humanities and Education
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Prelude

Forty-five years ago, a beautiful 7 pound, 8 ounce baby girl was born to a happy young mother and Miss Melba [a pseudonym] decided that she must help. She knew that the young mother would not want to leave her young baby at home or even—for fear of “mal yeux”—to take the baby with her to be registered at Cunapo. So bright and early that fateful Friday morning, three days after the birth, Miss M went across the road to her young neighbour to offer her good service.

“Elva,” she said, “I going down the road. You want me to register the child for you?”

*The young mother was grateful, but she knew that Miss M was illiterate so she wrote “**Pamela**” on a sheet of paper to be presented to the Registrar of Births because she wanted her baby’s name to be correctly spelt. However, “Man proposes but God disposes,” as is often wisely said. It is not clear what happened to the sheet of paper in transit from Fishing Pond [where the baby was born] to Cunapo [where the Registrar of Births was located]. Maybe, before completing her act of kindness, Miss M first went to the market that Friday morning and the piece of paper was lost in the hurly-burly of activity that was involved. What was clear, though, was that nary a sliver of paper could be found when Miss M reached the Registrar of Births.*

*Miss M, though, was not a woman to be deflected from what she set out to do. She had left home with the self-appointed task of registering a baby’s birth and she intended to do exactly that. Besides, she reasoned, she could hear. She remembered hearing what the young mother had said she wanted her baby to be named. She could also speak as well. After all, she continued to reason, she had “an English tongue” in her head, she could say the name. Miss M therefore blithely proceeded to enunciate what she felt should be the baby’s name. Even though she had not had the benefit of formal education, she knew register. She knew that the way one spoke on formal occasions was different to how one spoke at home or with one’s friends. Speaking in style, as they say, she pronounced the first vowel in the first syllable of **Pa/me/la** as [ɜ:]; that is, an r-controlled ‘e.’ Thus she enunciated “**Permilla**.” The Registrar of Births was a good student of phonics. She wrote exactly what she heard.*

The baby so ingeniously named in the above story was this researcher. It seems that I have been fated, from very early in life, to be affected by the reading-challenged. When I first learned about how I got my name I was 9 years old and an avid reader. It seemed to me then that it was infra dig that an illiterate had named me. However, as I grew older with a concomitant increase in my ability to empathize, and having encountered in my first year of secondary school a fellow student who could barely read, I began to wonder

what life must be like for people who cannot read. This fascination with the reading-challenged increased with my teaching experiences and has consequently influenced the focus of this study.

The Problem

In the 23 years during which I was a teacher in what was then described as the Senior Comprehensive School system,¹ I continuously encountered reading-challenged students in the classroom. The term *reading-challenged students* refers to those students I encountered who displayed varying levels of difficulty in making meaning of the written word. While statistics show that girls, on average, demonstrate higher levels of reading proficiency than boys (UNESCO, 2003), the term *reading-challenged* is not gender specific—both boys and girls seemed challenged. Such students, not surprisingly, did not read for pleasure. If they read at all it was merely for utilitarian purposes—primarily the reading of their textbooks. Their reading comprehension skills were limited to answering literal questions only and they experienced considerable difficulty in making inferences. When they came upon an unfamiliar word, they seemed unaware of strategies that entail structural analysis (using word parts to determine pronunciation and meaning), knowledge of principles of phonics (relating letters or letter groups to the sounds they represent), and the use of context clues to help them to meet their challenge. They had a limited vocabulary—often a new word was regarded as a “big word” but no alacrity was displayed to utilize the dictionary to demystify the “big word.” In fact, in a class of 40 students one might find only one student with a dictionary. Even when the dictionary was used to find the meaning of a word, a meaning would be merely plucked out with no reference to the context of the sentence from which it had originally come. Textbooks were often left at home—the preference was to have two or three notebooks in an otherwise empty school bag. Forced enrolment in the school library often resulted in their losing the books or their keeping them beyond the due date. Many of these students showed a preference for technical or specialized craft subjects. When placed in a class that had no technical or specialized craft subjects, and when confronted by the teacher with their failure to do homework, they often protested that they had not chosen that class.

The above scenario has implications for students’ identification of themselves as members of a particular community which encounters more complex vowel and syllabication patterns (Blevins, 2001), and which applies complex learning strategies to print in order to make meaning. It also has implications for their academic achievement: reading is fundamental to their effective functioning as students at the fourth form level, where they have to engage in self-questioning about what they read, synthesize information from many sources, identify and understand key vocabulary, make notes, evaluate an author’s point of view, and search the Internet for information. It has implications, ultimately, for their level of employment and socio-economic status later on (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2000).

In Trinidad and Tobago, research on secondary students’ perspectives on schooling has been conducted at what was then termed the junior secondary level [Forms 1–3] (Jules,

1998) and at the level of the five-year secondary school (Superville, 1998). Research has also been conducted on the career aspirations of fifth-form students at the senior comprehensive school [Forms 4–6] (Mohammed, 1996) and students’ perceptions of learner needs at the level of the five-year secondary school (Saney, 1991).

Research on the reading attainment of students at the level of the secondary school has so far focused on first-form students (Mohammed, 1992). Lack of research on the perspectives on schooling of reading-challenged fourth-form students limits the extent to which educators and education policy planners could cater to educational needs of these students in the education system. There is therefore a need to explore the strategies used by such students to make meaning of text beyond their reading ability, their perceptions of schooling, and how those perceptions inform their responses to school and might influence their self-efficacy and hopes for the future.

Background

The site of the proposed study was the first senior comprehensive school to have been established in Trinidad and Tobago, under the 15-Year Education Plan, 1968–1983, as part of the initiative to diversify the education system in order to provide trained manpower to service the new industrialization thrust of the economic planners. However, the curriculum of the school is largely academic with a few technical subjects. The school has a population of approximately 1,700 students who are in Forms 4 to Upper Six and are aged 14–20 years. By the time students entered this school in the fourth form, they had already experienced close to a decade of schooling—six to seven years of primary schooling as well as three years at the lower levels of the secondary school system, in what at the time were described as junior secondary schools.

In September 2003, a diagnostic cloze test was administered to 357 of approximately 600 newly arrived fourth formers, whose ages ranged from 14 to 17 years. Tables 1 and 2 illustrate the mismatch between their reading experience and the readability of their texts.

Table 1. Reading Experience of New Fourth-Formers, September 2003

Reading Age	Number of Students
12 years	54
10 years	57
8 years	96
6 years	38
Remedial	112

Table 2. Readability of Some Fourth Form Texts as Determined by the Fry's Readability Graph

Text	Readability (U.S)	Trinidad Grade Equivalent
Toolsie, R. (1996). <i>Mathematics: A complete course with CXC questions, Vol. One</i> . Chaguanas, Trinidad: Caribbean Educational Publishers.	Grade 10	Form 4
Gangadeen, H., & Ninah, B. (2002). <i>A complete English course for secondary schools Bk. 4: Examination level</i> . San Fernando, Trinidad: Caribbean Educational Publishers.	Grade 11	Form 5
Ramsawak, R., & Umraw, R. R. (2001). <i>Modules in social studies</i> . San Fernando, Trinidad: Caribbean Educational Publishers.	College	University
Duncan, T. (1983). <i>Success in electronics</i> . London: John Murray.	Grade 12	Form 6
Donnelly, E. L. (1985). <i>Electrical installation: Theory and practice</i> . Surrey, UK: Thomas Nelson & Sons.	Grade 10	Form 4
Parker, M. A. (1990). <i>Engineering drawing with worked examples</i> . UK: Stanley Thornes.	Grade 11	Form 5
Rahil, V. A. M. (1994). <i>New Caribbean geography with map reading and C.X.C. questions</i> . San Fernando, Trinidad: Caribbean Educational Publishers	Grade 12	Form 6
Claypole, W., & Robottom, J. (1981). <i>Caribbean story: Book one: Foundations</i> . Trinidad: Longman Caribbean.	Grade 10	Form 4
Jackson, B., & Whiteley, P. (2003). <i>Longman physics for CXC (2nd ed.)</i> . San Juan, Trinidad: Longman Trinidad.	Grade 10	Form 4

Source: Estes & Vaughn (1985).

Students of the school come mainly from low SES or lower middle-class backgrounds. This is supported by employment statistics—of the approximately 590,000 people who constitute the Trinidad and Tobago labour force, 90% work for \$5,000 per month or less (Mohammed, 2004). Their parents' occupations typically include nursing, teaching, clerical work, taxi driving, and suitcase trading. Many are from single-parent, female-headed households. When asked what materials are read in their homes, they would often

reply that their parents read the newspapers and the Bible. Discussions with them about storytelling at home reveal that this does not occur. In fact, many are latchkey children who leave home after their parents have gone to work and return before their parents have ended their working day. In other words, many have not had extensive opportunities at home for initiation into habits of literacy.

Moreover, the realities of life in Trinidad and Tobago—social, economic, political, technological—have created many students with special educational needs. Children with such needs are not well catered for in the education system of Trinidad and Tobago. The UNDP sponsored Trinidad and Tobago *National Human Development Report 2000* (UNDP, 2000), titled *Youth at Risk*, criticizes a system which “instead of increasing numbers of self-regulated, balanced individuals, (allows for) increases in social malaise and apathy, evidenced by *inter alia* increases in crime” (p. 42). It indicts the education system as not having “adapted favourably to the special needs of vulnerable groups” (p. 8).

The *Education Policy Paper (1993–2003)* (Trinidad and Tobago [T&T]. National Task Force on Education, 1994) further emphasizes that neither special provisions nor support services for children with special needs exist in the country’s regular schools. It cites research conducted by the Child Guidance Clinic which found that 80% of children who have been identified as having special education needs by their referral to and assessment by the Child Guidance Clinic “are receiving inappropriate education and their special education needs are not being met in the existing system” (p. 62).

Current learning theory and recent research on how the brain learns regard students as possessing unique learning styles. Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences (MI) perceives each individual as having different intelligences with varied abilities. These intelligences are verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, musical-rhythmic, bodily-kinesthetic, intrapersonal, interpersonal, and naturalistic (Lazear, 1991; Teele, 2000). Teaching in the classroom must cater to these intelligences. Current research has also shown that students who are having difficulties in the educational system often have brain-based biological problems that can be mitigated by making changes in the context in which the student works (Jensen, 2001).

Rationale

I felt that an instrumental case study (Stake, 1994, 1995) would satisfy my interest in these students’ experiences of the curriculum—and their consequent utilization of coping strategies, given a possible level of frustration (Field & Boesser, 2002; Raphael, 2004). My interest existed in the context that the Government of Trinidad and Tobago (T&T. National Task Force, 1994) declares, *inter alia*,

That every child has an inherent right to an education which will enhance the development of maximum capability regardless of gender, ethnic, economic, social or religious background....

That every child has an inalienable right to an education which facilitates the achievement of personal goals and the fulfillment of obligations to society....

That students vary in natural ability, and that schools therefore should provide, for all students, programmes which are adapted to varying abilities, and which provide opportunity to develop differing personal and socially useful talents. (p. xvii)

These assertions are in keeping with Article 28 of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* of September 1990 (UNICEF, 1990) and the *World Declaration on Education for All* adopted at the Jomtien World Conference of March 1990 (UNESCO, 1990), which both underscore the right of every child to basic education.

It is hoped that a comparison with similar cases would have some resonance for the reader who would have vicariously experienced the participants' perspectives.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this instrumental case study is to reveal the perspectives on schooling of two fourth-form students who read below their chronological age and who were enrolled in a senior secondary comprehensive school on the "East-West Corridor" in Trinidad and Tobago. The phrase *perspectives on schooling* refers to the strategies employed by these students to cope with the curriculum, their affective responses to schooling, and the extent to which they perceived their special educational needs to be catered for in the then existing senior comprehensive school system.

Research Questions

I hope to answer the following questions:

- *Given their relatively low self-concept as readers how do these students affectively respond to schooling?*
- *What strategies do they employ to negotiate the curriculum?*
- *How do they perceive the role of home, school, peers in helping them to negotiate the curriculum?*

Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the study will give voice to the perspectives of those directly affected by educational policy and practice. It is important to reveal the world as it is seen through students' eyes to parents, teachers, educational researchers, and educational policy planners. Such a revelation may consequently inform the change process in educational policy and practice.

This is particularly relevant at a time when efforts are being made to overhaul the education system as evidenced by the various educational initiatives—among them the Secondary Education Modernization Programme (SEMP) and the Continuous Assessment Programme (CAP).

Organization of the Study

The rest of the study has been organized as follows:

- Chapter 2 reviews literature pertinent to defining reading as well as literature that connects the home environment, scaffolding, and the Trinidad Creole to reading acquisition. It also reviews literature on reading as it relates to motivational theory, adolescence, and self-concept as a reader.
- Chapter 3 describes the methodology employed in the execution of the study—particularly in terms of identifying the approach used, describing how the participants were selected, how data were collected and analysed, the ethical considerations that were observed, and the delimitations of the study.
- Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study.
- Chapter 5 concludes the study by recalling the process of data collection and analysis, summarizing the findings, and identifying the extent to which the study has added to the existing body of knowledge on the affective aspects of education.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Reading is ever present in our print-rich society and so the acquisition of reading ability is a necessary prerequisite for an individual's effective functioning. Reading is therefore very important. The thrust in the United States (US) to foster reading engagement, as embodied in the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act* of 2001, is an example of the importance accorded reading—and by extension literacy—internationally. This chapter reviews the available literature that pertains to reading acquisition.

Definition of Reading

“Reading is thinking guided by print...or the skill of transforming printed words into spoken words” (Perfetti, 1986, p. 18). It is comprehension (Cain, Oakhill, & Bryant, 2004; van Gelderen et al., 2004). It is interactive (Cooper, 1997) and consists of overlapping processes (Perfetti). It is not a natural act (Fitzsimmons, 1998; Lyon, 1998; Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2001) but must be taught (Asselin, 2001; Cooper, 1997; Foorman & Torgesen, 2001; Joseph, 2002; Lyon, 1998; Mills, 1970; Moats, 2001; Perfetti; Rayner, Foorman, Perfetti, Pesetsky, & Seidenberg, 2002; Shaywitz & Shaywitz). It is not merely a collection of skills but is related to prior learning, meaning, and context (Cooper, 1997; Friere, 1991; Goodman, 1991; Rosenblatt, 1991), and its acquisition is inextricably linked with culture—ethnicity, social class, and primary language (Au & Mason, 1981; Au & Raphael, 2000; Craig, 1999, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Delpit, 1988; Nagle, 1999).

There is general agreement in the literature that early reading engagement is crucial to reading success; that the child's early literacy experiences are fundamental to reading achievement. The home environment, therefore, has an important function in a child's reading attainment.

Home Environment and Reading

Reading practices in the home have an impact on children's reading success or failure. The parents who read provide the models for their children to follow. Moreover, home literacy practices—making inferences, predicting, and making judgements about text enable children to construct meaning on a variety of levels (Roser & Martinez, 1985; Teale, 1981). Children who have stimulating literacy experiences, such as lap reading (where parents read with their children), before entering formal schooling, have improved vocabulary growth and develop an awareness of print and literacy concepts (Hiebert, 1981; Lyon, 1998; Mullis, 1995; Ninio, 1983). Family rules about TV watching can often lead to children's reading for entertainment (Guthrie, Schafer, Wang, & Afflerbach, 1995) with the possible “Matthew effect”—cumulative growth in vocabulary development, reading ability, and attitude to reading (Cunningham & Stanovich, 2003).

Moreover, there is a correlational link between low reading achievement and SES (Cappella & Weinstein, 2001; Davidson & Koppenhaver, 1993; Jimerson, Egeland, & Teo, 1999). The general perception is that the poor student is not exposed to as many books and parental modelling of positive behaviours as in the middle-class home environment (Teale, 1981); that in the low SES home environments, if reading is practised at all it may be for strictly utilitarian purposes—reading the Bible or the newspapers. These home literacy practices may not be congruent with success in the school and may be different from those to which children are exposed in middle-class homes (Nagle, 1999). Conversely, however, studies imply that middle-class students show more reading readiness and a greater adaptability to the school environment than students of low SES. Cappella and Weinstein suggest that poor students are less likely to be academically resilient by 12th grade because of a lower internal locus of control, lower educational aspirations, and exposure to a less challenging high school curriculum.

Poor students are especially dependent on the school to provide them with literacy-promoting activities since these are not readily available in their homes (Craig, 1999; V. E. Lee & Croninger, 1994). The child who enters school without preschool reading advantage is quite likely to experience disadvantage cumulatively. It has been suggested that parents' beliefs about learning and literacy can be utilized in building relationships that foster students' success in school (Neuman, Hagedorn, Celano, & Daly, 1995). Since reading is language based, the language of the home also impacts on students' reading acquisition.

Emphasizing the importance of home literacy practices on children's reading acquisition, Burgess, Hecht, and Lonigan (2002), in a one-year longitudinal study of 97 middle-income 4- and 5-year-old children in Northern Florida, described six types of home literacy experiences (HLE) that were statistically significantly related to oral language, phonological sensitivities, and word decoding ability. These were:

1. Limiting Environment—parents' resources determine the extent of the literacy experiences they provide for their children.
2. Literacy Interface—parents are involved in activities which directly/indirectly introduce children to literacy activities or to the parents' valuing of reading as important.
3. Passive HLE—parents' activities model for children literacy usage or alternative leisure activities.
4. Active HLE—parents deliberately involve children in activities aimed at literacy or language development.
5. Shared reading.
6. A composite of all the five above generalizations.

Vygotsky's "Zone of Proximal Development"

The importance of parental involvement in their children's literacy learning is suggested by Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism, which sees intellectual skills as growing

out of social interactions in the accomplishment of tasks. “Learning on the interpsychological plane often involves mentoring provided by more culturally knowledgeable persons, usually elders, who engage in activity with less experienced or knowledgeable persons” (C. D. Lee & Smargorinsky, 2000, p. 2). The metaphor *scaffolding* (C. D. Lee & Smargorinsky, citing Bruner, 1975) has been used to describe the process of supportive guidance that is adjusted to the learner’s progress, providing the necessary help for mastery while encouraging the child’s assumption of greater responsibility as his/her ability increases.

According to the Vygotskian perspective, the literate parent who provides literacy experiences such as lap reading, with the interactions between parent and child inherent in this exercise, is providing an initial modelling of reading behaviours for the child. As the child shows more and more confidence, the parent gradually removes the support until the child can perform the reading task independently. The child is thus able to read independently after an initial period of collaboration with a more knowledgeable individual (the literate parent) in a problem-solving reading environment. The distance between where the child is and where the knowledgeable adult wants the child to be is called the zone of proximal development.

Trinidad Creole and Reading Ability

The vernacular in Trinidad and Tobago, although different from Standard English, shares enough of a vocabulary base with it to influence the student into thinking that he knows the standard when in fact he does not. This can impede students’ comprehension of text. Craig (1999) posits one approach that seems akin to the United Kingdom (UK) position in the Bullock Report—*A Language for Life*—in the 1970s. Craig’s approach to fostering literacy recognizes the validity of the Creole. He suggests, however, that the teacher’s role is to provide models of appropriate language for particular purposes and in specific contexts. In this approach, the school is seen as the place where students are inducted into the use of Standard English. This approach also recognizes that students bring to the school language capabilities that must be built upon if induction into the standard language—a passport to educational and economic success, and international communication—is to be facilitated.

Adolescence, Reading Achievement, Self-Concept as a Reader, and Attitude to Reading

While it is generally accepted that reading problems should be diagnosed and remediated early in the child’s life, it is also a fact that a number of adolescents have never had the benefit of this early intervention. The adolescent with low reading achievement who has reached secondary school would have experienced reading difficulty all his life (Cappella & Weinstein, 2001; Juel, 1988; Lerner, 1997; Sousa, 2001), and so “is extremely vulnerable to continued low achievement or failure by the end of high school” (Cappella & Weinstein) because he would be unprepared for the increased demands of the secondary school curriculum (Adams, Lerner, & Anderson, 1979)—the higher-order learning activities that are encountered at the secondary level of schooling in the process

of making meaning in text (Blevins, 2001; Moats, 2001). He would be disempowered—barred from fully and beneficially participating in the “secondary Discourses” (Gee, 1990, as cited in Lankshear, 1994) of the school. *Secondary Discourse* is that use of language which is needed to function in secondary institutions (institutions beyond the home as primary socializing unit, for example, the school). According to James Gee (as cited in Lankshear, 1994), mastery of language uses within Secondary Discourses is literacy. Since “literacy begins with the initial acquisition of reading” (Craig, 1999), and in so far as literacy is said to empower, then reading also empowers. This is so whether empowerment is defined as access to acquisition of social goods (money, power, status) (Gee, 2000), or becoming socially and politically conscious about one’s position in society and being spurred to working for equity (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Friere, 1984, 1991).

With respect to Piaget’s theory of cognitive development (Woolfolk, 2001), an adolescent with low reading ability would have suffered a maturational lag. Inadequate reading skills limit exposure to the information that would give the requisite prior knowledge to allow for assimilation and, consequently, accommodation of the new knowledge of the secondary school syllabus into the adolescent’s schema (Brown, 1994; Stanovich, 1991; Valtin & Naegele, 2001). Moreover, now that the student can think in terms of past, present, and future (Woolfolk), he can envisage how his low reading ability may impact his life in the future.

Adolescent egocentrism (Woolfolk, 2001) further complicates matters for the reading-challenged adolescent. Adolescents become focused on their own ideas. They analyse their own beliefs and attitudes and assume that everyone else is just as interested in their thoughts, beliefs, and behaviour. This may lead to Elkind’s sense of an “imaginary audience” (Elkind, 1981, as cited in Woolfolk, 2001)—the feeling that they are the focus of everyone else’s attention. The adolescent then sees himself in the reactions of others. Children often see themselves in the reactions of others. They evaluate themselves in relation to the value given to them by the people around them. Children with low reading ability may elicit negative reactions from others in relation to their disability, with consequent negative effect on their self-concept with respect to reading (Aunola, Leskinen, Onatsu-Arvilommi, & Nurmi, 2002; Bruininks, 1978; Chapman, Tunmer, & Prochnow, 2000; Cole, 2003; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Valtin & Naegele, 2001). This is no less the case with the adolescent with his sense of an “imaginary audience.”

The adolescent with low reading ability, therefore, would have a clear self-concept of his ability to read. This would have been gleaned from his past experiences with reading and his perceptions of how others view him—teachers, parents, and peers. His low self-concept as a reader, feeling of disempowerment, ability to speculate about his future, and the frustration of trying to cope with a curriculum that seems inaccessible may all combine to negatively impact his motivation to continue in school. In terms of Erikson’s fourth stage of psychosocial development, he would have landed on the side of inferiority (Woolfolk, 2001). Such an adolescent may also be in danger of experiencing James Marcia’s *identity diffusion* rather than *identity achievement* (Woolfolk, 2001). He may, as a consequence, experience low achievement motivation.

Thus, the adolescent reader's self-concept and attitude towards reading are the affective aspects that influence adolescent motivation to read. Readers who are interested in reading are likely to persist in reading more than uninterested readers. Juel (1988) asked fourth graders whether they would rather read or clean their rooms—40% of poor readers chose cleaning, as opposed to only 5% of good readers who did. Wang (2000) identified several factors as influencing children's attitudes to reading. Among these are teachers' ways of teaching, children's personal experiences in reading, children's confidence in reading, and parents' attitudes towards reading. Readers with positive self-concepts enjoy their reading experience, identify with what they read, and are likely to be intrinsically motivated (Ghaith & Bouzeineddine, 2003).

Motivational Theory

Self-efficacy theory: Motivation to act, the choices made to act, and the level of motivation in effecting the task are determined by belief about capability to accomplish the task. Perceived self-efficacy refers to people's beliefs about their capability to accomplish a task/s (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy is content-specific—that is, a person may be competent in one area of endeavour and not another. Sewell and St. George (2000) identify four sources of beliefs about our efficacy: past mastery or failure experiences, vicarious experiences through social models, social or “self-persuasion” of capability, and one's physiological and emotional stress reactions. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave. People who doubt their capabilities shy away from tasks they perceive as difficult (Bandura, 1994).

Research findings suggest that perceptions of self-efficacy affect learning and motivation. Highly efficacious students will spend more effort on challenging learning tasks (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990), and the efficacious reader has multiple purposes for reading (Greaney & Neuman, 1990). Sewell and St. George (2000, p. 60) have summarized the cognitive, metacognitive, and motivational processes seen in highly efficacious students. According to them, such students:

- choose to participate in their learning
- expend more effort in their learning
- seek more challenging learning experiences
- persist longer when faced with difficulty
- cope serenely in the face of adversity
- recover from failure more quickly
- are more motivated to learn
- achieve higher goals in learning
- use a variety of learning strategies

- quickly discard a faulty strategy
- attribute success to ability and strategic effort
- attribute failure to inappropriate strategy use

The adolescent with low reading ability shies away from reading because it is a slow, painful task, with the result that he is involved in a cycle of frustration with further deleterious effect on his self-efficacy—he cannot read well so he does not like to read; he gains insufficient reading experience and so is unfamiliar “with the vocabulary, sentence structure, text organization, and concepts of academic ‘book’ language” (Moats, 2001). Since the language of instruction and the language of the textbook may pose a challenge to the student with low reading ability this may further increase his feeling of inadequacy (Field & Boesser, 2002).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

The study was aimed at exploring two reading-challenged students' perspectives on schooling. The phrase *perspectives on schooling* refers to the strategies employed by these students to cope with the curriculum, their affective responses to schooling, and the extent to which they perceived their special educational needs to be catered for in the former senior comprehensive school system. Of the three research questions that I posed, I chose to operationalize the following: *Given their relatively low self-concept as readers, how do they affectively respond to schooling?*

Instrumental Case Study

I chose to use the instrumental case study approach as best suited to operationalize the selected research question, given its ability to reveal an issue (Stake, 1994, 1995). It is an approach that fits within the category of educational ethnography (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). The study is bounded in place—one senior comprehensive school—and time—two months of data collection that enabled prolonged engagement in the setting—(Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Stake, 1994, 1995). It was conducted in a natural setting—the participants' school—to allow for persistent observation and learning of the participants' culture (Atkinson & Hammersley; Cresswell, 1998; Goetz & LeCompte; LeCompte & Schensul; Stake, 1994, 1995). Its eliciting of the personal meanings of two students—primarily from interviews—places it in the phenomenological paradigm (Fetterman, 1998; Goetz & LeCompte; LeCompte & Schensul). The stipulation for rich, thick description through gathering data from multiple sources (Cresswell; Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1994, 1995) was effected through audiotaped interviews with students, teachers, parents; examination of the students' academic records; observation of them during classroom interactions; analysis of the school's educational policy documents; and maintenance of a reflective journal. This researcher was the main research instrument to locate participants; gather information through interviews and observation; record, code, analyse, and store data; and reflect on the meanings elicited from the data (Cresswell; Merriam; Stake, 1994, 1995).

Selection of Participants

I chose two participants, Aaron and Sarah [pseudonyms], who were both willing and cooperative. They were chosen from an initial group of four students. My informing the first two students whom I had identified as likely candidates of their reading levels had resulted in one candidate's refusal to participate (a refusal that I suspect was fuelled by her embarrassment on my disclosing to her what her reading level was). I therefore did not explore the other candidate's perspective since I felt that data gathering would be tainted. I did not disclose the eventual participants' reading levels to them until after the data gathering process.

Aaron and Sarah were chosen on the recommendations of their English Language teacher, who selected them using the criteria that I had provided—that they should have difficulty reading and be willing participants. I then proceeded to determine their reading levels using the Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) of the Curriculum Division of the Ministry of Education (MOE). The IRI consists of a word recognition list of 20 words each for First Year to Standard 5, one silent reading passage for pre-primer (a term used in the instrument), and one silent and oral reading passage each graded for First Year to Standard 5. The passages graded for First Year to Standard 2 Levels are 150 words long and the passages for Standards 3 to 5 are 250 words long. Both silent and oral reading passages are equipped with questions designed to test comprehension. These questions are literal, inferential, and problem-solving. There are also questions designed to elicit students' understanding of vocabulary. The oral reading passages can be used for identification and analysis of miscues.

The IRI revealed that Aaron was “instructional” (can read and understand with teacher assistance) at Year 5 (Standard 3 in our primary school system) in both silent and oral reading; and Sarah was instructional at Year 6 (Standard 4 in our primary school system) in both silent and oral reading (see Appendix A).

My observation of reading-challenged students during my 23 years experience as an English Language teacher revealed that they do not read for pleasure. If they do read at all it is merely for utilitarian purposes; primarily, they read their textbooks to do assignments. Their reading comprehension skills are limited to answering literal questions only and they experience considerable difficulty in making inferences. When they come upon an unfamiliar word, they seem unaware of structural analysis (using word parts to determine pronunciation and meaning); phonics (blending letter sounds); and the use of context clues as strategies to meet their challenge. They have a limited academic vocabulary. These behaviours suggest that such students have a relatively low reading self-concept. I therefore administered the Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) (Gambrell, Palmer, Codling, & Mazzone, 1996) in order to determine their reading self-concept. The MRP consists of a reading survey and a conversational interview. The reading survey consists of 20 cued response items and two subscales: Self-concept as a Reader and Value of Reading (see Appendix B-i). The conversational interview consists of 14 open-ended questions divided into three sections: narrative reading, informational reading, and general reading (see Appendix B-ii). Gambrell et al. did not stipulate the ranges to determine the levels for self-concept as a reader. I therefore chose the range for high self-concept as a reader to be above 80%.

The results of the MRP were as follows:

- Aaron: Self-concept as a reader — 28 (70%); Value of reading — 27 (67.5%)
- Sarah: Self-concept as a reader — 22 (55%); Value of reading — 24 (60%)

Qualitative data obtained from interviews and observation confirmed the results of the MRP that both participants had a low self-concept as a reader. Aaron, who recognized that he had “*a lil’ problem*” with respect to reading, read merely for utilitarian purposes:

“Is only things I need to read I will catch myself reading...I know I need to read often but I don’t.” None of the books he started to read for pleasure were completed: *“Well I read piece of one and when I read piece I just put down the book and look for something else. I haven’t read a whole romance novel.”* When asked how many books he had read for pleasure in his life as a reader, he replied: *“Mus’ be about ten books. But I haven’t completed them. I just read like pieces.”*

Sarah declared: *“I just...do not like to read because I find that it just take up your time.”* She was aware that her reading was not up to par: *“I can’t read good”* and that she *“kind of”* needed help. She was adamant, however, that: *“I doh really like to read.”* And went on to explain: *“I like to be with friends. And when you reading you by yourself.”* She said: *“I doh mind watching the TV than to sit down and read a book. And I like to play and thing.”*

Data Collection

For the purpose of triangulation, I collected data from multiple sources (Cresswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Data collection was primarily qualitative but there were some quantitative elements. These were in the form of statistics based on the participants’ own reading levels using the MOE’s IRI and the administration of the MRP (Gambrell et al., 1996).

The qualitative data were collected mainly through semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C) and, to a lesser degree, observation. I interviewed mainly the participants, their teachers, and one parent. Most interviews were conducted on site at lunchtime and on the few occasions when participants’ free periods coincided with mine.

Ethical Considerations

Before conducting interviews with participants, I clearly stated the intended purpose of the study—orally and in writing—to the intended participants and their parents (see Appendix D) and I received written parental consent. I also gave assurances of anonymity and privacy and gave interviewees the option of withdrawal (see Appendix D).

Data Analysis

The exercise of data analysis was a constructivist one. I had to make meaning out of the apparent chaos of the considerable data that my research question had generated. When I did begin, everything seemed so important that I generated many codes, so much so that I felt that I had opened up the proverbial hornet’s nest or Pandora’s box.

The process of coding could best be described as spiralling, in that I first read the interview data after transcription and noted the words and phrases which I felt were significant to the research question (see Appendix E-i). This analysis usually generated more questions, which led to more data, which led to more coding. To better manage the data I decided to place the codes into categories (see Appendix E-ii). This made it

somewhat easier for me to access implicit meanings. Eventually, repetition of information suggested saturation of data. This, combined with the need to satisfy time restrictions, dictated my cutting short the data collection.

Data analysis led to the review of literature. Even though the review of literature appears in the previous chapter, in reality the situation was not as linear. Before collecting data, based on my experiences as a teacher I had done some reading. However, these readings had no real resonance for me. It was only after I had analysed the data that I proceeded to write the literature review; an example of this is when my analysis of the data revealed the issue of motivation as pertinent to participants' perspectives on schooling. This led me to read on motivation theory in order to explain what I had discerned from the participants' responses.

Delimitations

The following suggest the extent to which my findings in the following chapter are restricted:

- Member checking was limited to short discussions with the students about the meanings that I got from the interviews. I did not provide them with written evidence of what I had found.
- Time restrictions dictated my cutting short data collection. I did not visit Aaron's home, neither did I conduct an interview with his guardian. Communication with Sarah's mother was limited to a relatively short telephone interview as she had another engagement to attend, and future plans to continue the interview did not come to fruition; again, because of time restrictions.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

In my aim to explore two reading-challenged students' perspectives on schooling, I chose to operationalize the following research question: *Given their relatively low self-concept as readers, how do they affectively respond to schooling?*

The research question was operationalized mainly through interviewing and observation of the participants in their natural setting. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing for questioning with the ultimate intent of connecting the participants' affective responses to schooling with their self-concept as readers. In assessing the participants' self-concept as readers, I used Gambrell et al.'s (1996) definition, which is "students' self-perceived competence in reading and self-perceived performance relative to peers" (p. 522). This they saw as being related to valuing reading. Chapman and Tunmer (1995) similarly saw self-concept as a reader as consisting of competence in reading, perceptions of difficulty in reading, and attitudes to reading.

The data generated by the research question have provided an in-depth, close-up view of the participants' perspective on schooling. They suggested that self-concept as a reader did not alone account for the participants' attitude to school. Aaron and Sarah perceived themselves as incompetent readers, based on both past experience (at home, and with teachers and peers) and their personal comparisons with current peers. Both participants had a relatively low self-concept as readers: they saw themselves as incompetent readers and as a consequence avoided reading tasks—neither of them completed the reading of a book for pleasure. When they did read at all, it was merely for utilitarian purposes—the reading of textbooks or the Bible. This is opposed to the student who has a high self-concept as a reader. Such a student would read for multiple purposes (Greaney & Neuman, 1990; Moller, 1999), and would have a positive attitude towards reading, be more likely to have a more positive self-concept as a learner, enjoy the school experience, be better able to understand reading material, and be more intrinsically motivated than a counterpart with a low self-concept as a reader (Ghaith & Bouzeineddine, 2003). Aaron and Sarah, however, both still saw school as a good place to be. Classroom structures, parental influence, socio-economic status, and teacher influence all had a part to play in how they viewed school.

In this chapter, I have first reconstructed those participant responses that suggest their positive attitudes towards schooling, and this is followed by responses from them that suggest their negative attitude towards schooling. These responses are arranged according to themes. In addition, I have also included responses from teachers and my own observation, where necessary, to support my analysis of the participants' perspectives.

I did not begin the study with the intention of comparing and contrasting both participants. However, analysis of the data lent itself to comparison, and so where the

participants' responses reflect similar themes I have presented them together. Later on, I shall further discuss the participants' responses in light of the literature. This will also include some element of comparison/contrast of the participants.

Affective Response

Sarah and Aaron, both perceiving themselves as relatively incompetent readers as a result of their past reading experience and their personal comparisons with current peers, gave responses that suggested both positive and negative attitudes towards schooling. The data revealed that they performed better and displayed more positively affective responses to some areas of schooling than to others. This is in keeping with motivational theory, in that people do not display high achievement in all situations, nor are they motivated to the same degree across diverse settings (Graham & Weiner, 1996).

Positive Affect

The data contained the following positive affective responses:

***Enthusiasm.** Even though Aaron was aware of his relative incompetence as a reader—“Once I get the pronunciation and the spelling right I’ll be able to read perfect. I should become a better reader”—he was a highly motivated student in a class where students did not seem inclined to achieve academically. When asked what he enjoyed most about school, he replied: “What I enjoy most about school is being educated by my teachers. Getting a greater knowledge of things. Knowing about life. That is really what I enjoy about school.” This earned him the respect of his teachers. His English teacher identified him as being a highly cooperative student who would usually complete all his homework and remind her when homework should be collected. She testified that despite his relatively low reading ability he was still interested in expanding his vocabulary:*

*He’d be the one—sometimes the only one—to have done all his homework. If I forget he will say, “Miss, I have done the homework.” He would try to do a little extra and he’s the one with the “big words” [with a smile].... He really loves to use these big words and no matter what exercise is given, he’d always try to find a “big word” for a simple word.... Even though he may not be able to spell the word or sometimes use the word in context he is always aware of these words.... I really appreciate his knowledge or **desire** [uttered with emphasis] to expand his vocabulary.*

His Electrical and Electronic Technology teacher was high in praise of him:

I think ---[real name called] is just about the top student I have in the class right now. His practical ability, his computer skills, his theoretical work is very high. I would recommend him.

He gave this praise in a situation in which Aaron was “not able to articulate properly everything” and even though “he is not as brilliant as the students in the past.” He continued to say:

He is always consistent. He continues to ask questions and seeks advice...he is very enthusiastic about his work. I think that is one of the reasons why he is on top of the class right now.... Not everybody is as enthusiastic as him...he would remind me about homework....

His Physics teacher testified that he was helpful towards his peers in the classroom, in that he “*likes to help other students.*” Of his enthusiasm, compared with his peers in the classroom, she said: “*He seems to want to do work while they don’t really seem to care very much about the subject.*”

Sarah, too, was aware of her relative incompetence as a reader: the “*smaller the word, the easier the word*” (as far as pronunciation is concerned). Comparing herself with her peers she asserted: “*them could read very well. I can’t read good.*” Yet her teachers, like Aaron’s, had mainly positive things to say about her attitude to schooling.

Her Integrated Science teacher admired her enthusiasm as reflected in her active involvement in class. Recalling Sarah’s past behaviour in class, she said:

She would [say], ‘Miss, Miss can I ask you a question please?’ She would, when questions are asked, answer out loud before I call her name. She likes to participate...she does her work.

Her English teacher also acknowledged that Sarah was actively involved in schoolwork in the classroom:

This is the third term and I’ve seen an improvement. She used to be more boisterous in class but I don’t know if it’s maturity...she is exhibiting more controlled behaviour and she is making an effort in class. She would volunteer to answer questions.

Having consulted my notes on my observation of Sarah in the classroom I did observe her actively participating in the class. To my question whether Sarah normally volunteered responses in class her English teacher testified: “*Yes, yes. She does. She does.*”

Perseverance. Aaron was aware of the fact that “*certain words and thing ... does give mih problems.*” However, recalling his junior secondary school experiences and remembering a situation where another student was being truant, Aaron declared his disagreement with that behaviour:

Is not to give up. Because if you give up you will reach nowhere. Because I see I and a next fella we was like at the same reading level but I see like he give up and he just start to duck classes. Like he couldn’t handle it. I say that is not the way to go. So I just keep on trying and figure it out.

He continued to reflect on his current school experience and expressed determination to persevere despite feeling otherwise inclined:

Sometimes I doesn't feel to get up and go to class ...a next class. But I does say 'Boy, geh up and go, nah.' Yuh understand? So. Because sometimes you doesn't feel in the mood like going to class but, yuh know? You can't let me mood stop me. So I does go.

He displayed a similar maturity in his reflection on the greater pleasure he experienced in playing basketball over reading and the greater importance he felt that reading had relative to basketball: *"If it come to want and need, I want basketball but I need reading."* His Physics teacher recognized that he strove despite disadvantages. She admitted that he *"is still a little slow"* but she asserted that *"he works hard and he **does** [uttered with emphasis] try...he is trying in a class where nobody is doing really very much...his goals are different to what theirs are."* His English teacher said of him: *"He loves school and he's not one to complain."*

Sarah also showed perseverance despite her perception that she was not as competent as her peers. Her English teacher compared her favourably to another reading-challenged student in her class:

There are two of them in the class who are not fluent readers and who are a little more challenged in terms of their writing ability. One...the other student in the class everything is boring. She does not make an effort. You try to correct her and she gets very offended. She does not try. However----- [real name called] is adopting a more positive attitude towards being corrected or towards being helped...if you tell her more than once to repeat the word or try to work out the word you find her making that effort and I think between the two of them that----- [real name called] is the one that should achieve a greater measure of success.

Preference for the current school over another. Sarah chose to be transferred to the present school not because of the curriculum or opportunities to read but because of the football team and the school's reputation among her peers. She wanted to come to her present school *"because I like to play football, one, and I wanted to come and join the football side. And everybody used to be talking well ----, ----, ---- is the best school."* She regarded her current school as being *"much better than"* her previous school which *"have poor teaching."*

Appreciation of small group activity. Aware of her relatively low reading competence, Sarah appreciated working in a small group where she could get peer support in cases where she did not quite understand the printed word: *"You friends and them in class could help you out."* During a post-classroom observation interview, I elicited her opinion on the group work in which she had been involved in the English class. She said of small group activity: *"It was much better. The group helping you out. Like you give them points for the story and they help you to build it up."* When presented with a scenario of her having to read in the Social Studies class in a situation in which she is not a very able reader, she had this to say: *"It will affect me because I will can't*

understand...if I read it...if my friends and them read it for me I will understand it but if I reading to myself I won't understand it a lot."

Negative Affect

The data contained the following negative affective responses:

Task avoidance. Aware of their relative incompetence as readers, both Aaron and Sarah sought to avoid reading tasks. In all his life as a reader, Aaron only remembered completing one book, and that was a book on basketball which he valued because it was about basketball and also because it was comparatively shorter than another book that he had attempted to read:

The basketball book I couldn't get my eyes off it. The Famous Five was thicker than the dictionary, right. And the basketball book was like must be so...[indicating a small distance between his thumb and forefinger]. It wasn't too long. It wasn't too short, you understand? But the Famous Five book I mighta read it like this month and put it down the next month...two months and after that I'd pick it back up again and start back reading like four chapters, you understand? And then I put it down.

Earlier on in the interview he said:

That mus' be the first book I ever read and finish, you know? Tha' is the first, first one. But the one with The Famous Five, right? That did come like after. But this one, ...this one like I couldn't get mih eyes off of it. I was enjoying it because, you know, tha' is something I like that is something that interest me.

Generally, though, he admitted:

Normally if I pick up a book and start reading and like I reach mus' be halfway or quarter I will fall asleep with the book. I don't know why I does fall asleep when I reading but tha's just happen.

Sarah gained little pleasure from reading:

Interviewer: On a scale of 1–10 rate the pleasure you get from reading.

Sarah: 3

Her response with respect to her reading history suggested a desire to avoid a direct answer to my question:

Interviewer: In your life as a reader, can you tell me how many books you have read for pleasure?

Sarah: No. I can't remember.

She also gave responses which suggested that she avoided reading tasks. She expressed preference for Mathematics simply because, in her perception, she does not have to do much reading:

Interviewer: Which subject do you like best?

Sarah: Mathematics.

Interviewer: Why do you like Mathematics?

Sarah: Because it don't have a lot of reading in it.

Interviewer: Don't you have to read to understand what the problem is?

Sarah: Not really. If the teacher explain it you don't have to read too much.

Her Integrated Science teacher also testified that Sarah relied more on hearing the teacher talk and on classroom discussion in order to cope in Integrated Science. She said of Sarah: *"She does very limited reading. Maybe she picks up a lot in the class. I get that tendency. She would pull things. When you talk she would be able to absorb it."*

When presented with a scenario of her coping with two subjects that require a great deal of reading—History and Social Studies—Sarah stated as follows:

Interviewer: How is your reading ability affecting your performance now in school? How do you think?

Sarah: It affects my performance a lot.

Interviewer: Describe what it feels like. Say for example you are in the Social Studies class and you have reading to do. How is it affecting you?

Sarah: It will affect me because...if my friends and them read it for me I will understand it but if I reading to myself I won't understand it a lot.

Interviewer: So what do you do in a case like that?

Sarah: Mr. K does read aloud for us.

Interviewer: What about the History.

Sarah: The teacher give us notes.

She claimed that she would usually understand the History notes *"because she [the history teacher] explain it to us in class."*

It seems that both Aaron and Sarah's refusal to take along their dictionary to school is part of their avoidance of reading tasks. Even though they both claimed that the dictionary helped them with their pronunciation and spelling, they complained that it was too heavy. Aaron had *"like a small dictionary. But like I find that is real weight to walk with. I prefer walking without."* Sarah did not usually carry a dictionary to school because she felt *"it too heavy."* Sarah, too, did not always take along her textbooks to school. She did not bring her Integrated Science text to class when I visited as an observer. Her Integrated Science teacher said of her:

She has a tendency to forget a lot. I don't know if it is intentional but for example I would ask her ---- where is the homework: 'Miss I forget it home'... You know, so I don't know. I say some day you will forget yourself.

Aaron, for his part, did not take any extra books for study. He took to school only what he needed:

Interviewer: Do you bring your textbooks to school all the time? All of them?

Aaron: Not all of them. Only the ones I need. The ones I need for the subjects I have.

Interviewer: So the ones that you need for the day you will bring to school.

Aaron: Yes.

Interviewer: Do you walk with any extra for studying if you have a free period?

Aaron: No. No I don't.

Anger. Aware of her relative incompetence as a reader, Sarah expressed aversion to completing comprehension exercises: *"When I look at a comprehension passage the first thing I does do is get vex because I don't really like to do comprehension."* She therefore would usually try to find a shortcut to completing the exercise: *"the questions is the first thing I does look at.... Because if you see the line number you will know what the question is about and what the answer will be."*

Embarrassment/fear of ridicule. Aware of their relatively low reading ability, both participants were fearful of the embarrassment involved in their seeming incompetence in front of their peers. Sarah did not like to read aloud in class when she was called to do so. She was "kinda frighten" when her teacher called on her to read aloud on the day I visited as observer. When pressed to further describe how she felt she replied:

I [drawn out] don't know. It's just that every time I go to read out loud I's get kinda frighten. She continued, I just feel like why me? Why nobody else? Why me?... I was just like...she coulda call on anybody...she coulda call on somebody else. Not me right at this moment.

She recalled past reading experiences in the class when she read aloud:

Everybody in the class would be like...if I skip out a word, everybody in the class would be like...shouting the word 'You miss out that word.' And then...I would continue.... But when everybody shout it out I put mih head on the desk.

She felt that way even when the teacher intervened on her behalf with *"All you...all you don't have to get on so."* She felt embarrassed although she knew that her classmates *"want to help.... Because tha' what friends for to help"* and even though she thought that reading aloud in class is necessary *"because people could help you out still."*

Aaron said:

The only time I does feel ahow is when I making mistakes. When I can't pronounce a word or when I don't know the meaning of the word. That is the only time I does feel ahow when I read in front of people.

When pressed to further explain he said: *"I does feel bad. I does feel ashamed."*

Desire for restoration of face. Conscious of her present low reading ability and expressing a desire to no longer perceive herself as a relatively incompetent reader, Sarah imagined a scenario where she would be reading competently to her brother and having a chance to regain face before others who had ridiculed her for being a less able reader than they were: *"I'll be reading and reading very well. And mih brother will be watching mih and saying 'How you reading so well.'"* She continued: *"I feel now I could cut style on people because I could read now."* She felt like that *"because every time when I was in primary school children laugh at me. So I could laugh at people now."*

Discussion

Sewell and St. George (2000) identified four sources of beliefs about efficacy—mastery or failure experiences, vicarious experiencing through others' efforts, self-persuading of capability, and physiological and emotional stress reactions. The participants' affective responses (positive and negative) have implications for their self-efficacy beliefs and achievement motivation in the classroom. Their responses are a direct consequence of their experiences with their teachers, peers, and parents; a mix of mastery and failure experiences; experiences that involved their own physiological stress reactions to their self-perceived competence. The participants' responses also reflect Bandura's position that self-efficacy is central to human actions. According to Bandura (1989), self-perception of efficacy influences thought, actions, and emotional arousal. What has been central is that all of Aaron and Sarah's responses are related to their self-concept as readers and their efforts to negotiate a secondary school curriculum, the mastery of which is heavily dependent on not only their reading ability but also their feeling that "I can" (Bandura, 1994).

Motivational theory suggests that there are two types of motivational goals that students have in different situations—mastery goals and performance goals (Ames & Archer, 1988). With the first type—mastery goals—students are motivated to learn or master a task. Having such goals, they are interested in learning, are challenged by difficult but attainable tasks, show persistence even in the face of failure, and exhibit a high level of self-regulation. With the second type—performance-oriented goals—students are motivated to look good and perform well. They are interested in being perceived by others and themselves as smart or competent. They give up on challenging tasks, especially in the face of failure; so that there is ego involvement rather than task involvement. Sarah and Aaron's embarrassment at making mistakes in oral reading in class is reflective of performance-oriented rather than mastery-oriented goals. They seem more interested in performing well before their peers, and their adolescent egocentricity

or sense of an imaginary audience (Woolfolk, 2001) only serves to heighten their discomfiture at what they perceive as their own public declaration of incompetence. Thus, Sarah wishes that she does not have to read aloud: *“she coulda call on somebody else. Not me right at this moment.”* Aaron confesses that if he makes mistakes in oral reading before the class he feels *“ahow.”* This seems to relate to what Kutnick (1994) and Osuji (1995) revealed about student achievement motivation in Trinidad and Tobago—that the senior comprehensive school student is not as achievement motivated as students of the 5- and 7-year denominational schools in our hierarchically arranged school system; in that they generally see themselves as not being as intelligent as students of the “prestige” schools. Aaron and Sarah’s reluctance to take along their dictionary to school is reflective of their task avoidance as well as their failure to be self-regulated readers. In my classroom observations of both participants, I observed them asking their teachers for word meanings and the spelling of words that they ought to have been able to discover themselves by using a dictionary.

The participants’ past and present experiences in the classroom have affected their self-efficacy. They are highly aware of what their peers think of them because in the past they have experienced ridicule; so that their present fear of ridicule is not unfounded. They usually practise oral reading in whole-class settings where fellow students are clearly aware of ability differences (Filby & Barnett, 1982), with the consequence that students are able to make judgements about their abilities vis-à-vis others in the classroom—judging less able readers as inadequate and subjecting them to ridicule. Less able readers therefore perceive themselves as experiencing less popularity among peers who are more able (Aunola et al., 2002; Bruininks, 1978; Chapman et al., 2000; Cole, 2003; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1997; Valtin & Naegele, 2001), and become preoccupied with avoiding public perception of “I cannot” (Graham & Weiner, 1996). It is not surprising then that Aaron seems to be more achievement-motivated than the rest of his classmates who do not seem to be achievement motivated at all. The competitive classroom structure allows him to compare himself with his peers and to perceive himself as being better off academically than the rest of his classmates. Hence he is positively oriented to school. He feels less stressed about school and can persuade himself of his own capability relative to them; so that even though he does not voluntarily engage in reading, he completes most of his assigned tasks and is actively involved in classwork. Sarah, on the other hand, is in a class where students are more achievement motivated and read better than she does. Because of the competitive classroom structure, she is aware that she is a less able reader than the rest of her classmates; so that she experiences some negative affect towards schooling. Aware of her relatively low reading competence when compared to her peers, she dreams of a time when she *“could cut style on people because I could read now.”* The fact that the competitive classroom structure is not favourable to Sarah is reflected in the more positive affective response she expressed towards the more cooperative learning experience involved in groupwork (Barnett & Irwin, 1994; Ghaith & Bouzeineddine, 2003).

The correlational link between socio-economic status and adaptability to the school environment could be another possible explanation for positive affective response towards schooling. The literature suggests that there is a relationship between SES and

the inculcation of behaviours that contribute to success in school (Cappella & Weinstein, 2001; Davidson & Koppenhaver, 1993; Jimerson et al., 1999; Nagle, 1999). Aaron enjoys a middle-class home environment. He lives with his aunt who is a tax accountant and who insists on success at school. This was recognized by his English teacher:

His aunt...maintains some high standard at home.... He does not have a lot of his own way...he has to be at home at a particular time...he is very conscious at home...it has to be a strong family input that is accounting for the behaviours in class.

Aaron therefore seems to have exposure to practices and behaviours that are more congruent with successful functioning in school (Cappella & Weinstein; Nagle).

The participants' interactions with their teachers also raise the issue of teacher praise as it relates to a fostering of positive student behaviours. Aaron's personality may be highly instrumental in eliciting teacher praise (Brophy, 1981), and his discernment of their positive regard may have further reinforced his positive attitudes towards schooling. He is a confident and sociable extrovert. All Aaron's teachers whom I interviewed consistently and approvingly remarked on his reminding them of homework to be corrected. Teacher response to Aaron could also be explained in terms of attribution theory, where affective responses act as goads eliciting helping and rewarding behaviour from others, which in turn may elicit more positive affect. Recognizing Aaron's hard work in the face of disadvantage, teachers were quick to give him highly positive assessments. His Electrical and Electronic Technology teacher was quick to utter "*I would recommend him*" in a situation where, as researcher, I was asking for no recommendation. Aaron, therefore, being perceived by his teachers as being low in ability and someone who has succeeded because of extra effort, has received more positive evaluations than might otherwise have been the case (Graham & Weiner, 1996).

Positive affective responses towards schooling as displayed by both participants may also be a direct consequence of parental involvement. Aaron's guardian and Sarah's mother provided four of the six home literacy experiences identified by Burgess et al. (2002). These are:

1. Limiting Environment— parents' resources determine the extent of the literacy experiences they provide for their children.
2. Literacy Interface—parents are involved in activities which directly/indirectly introduce children to literacy activities or to the parents' valuing of reading as important.
3. Passive HLE—parents' activities model for children literacy usage or alternative leisure.
4. Active HLE—parents deliberately involve children in activities aimed at literacy or language development

Both participants reported parental interest and involvement in their learning, thus suggesting a bi-directional relationship between their motivational orientation and

parental influence (Ginsburg & Bronstein, 1993), and displayed varying degrees of persistence as a result (Bank, Slavings, & Biddle, 1990).

Both Aaron and Sarah reported past experiences of being “boofed” by their teacher and by their parents, respectively. While these experiences may have impacted their attitudes to reading (Wang, 2000), their ultimate responses to school would be affected. The experience of being “boofed” is a negative one and would arouse negative emotional responses. Sarah recalled that she cried “*every time when I get boof.*” Of the two participants, she reported more instances of “boofing” yet she continued to be stoic—“*the boofing kinda help me but the crying never help.*” This stoicism, while being a positive affect, may also be a self-protective attributional strategy. As a consequence of the feeling of guilt that resulted from the criticism of parent and teachers, she attributes failure to herself. It is to her benefit, however, that this cause of failure was regarded in her eyes as internal, unstable, and controllable—lack of effort—rather than a stable cause—low ability (Graham & Weiner, 1996). She therefore maintained a reasonable hope of continuing to function in school. School was still a worthwhile place to be. Her teachers, in the main, testified that she displayed some positive affect towards school.

The data therefore highlighted the issues of student motivation and self-concept as a reader, and their links with parental influence, classroom structure, teacher-student interaction, peer relations, and student self-perception. Exploration of the perspectives of the participants in the present study suggests that the participants’ negative as well as positive responses to schooling are related to their experiences in both the home and the school.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

The study aimed to explore two reading-challenged students' perspectives on schooling, and so of the three research questions formulated, the following research question was operationalized: *Given their relatively low self-concept as readers, how do they affectively respond to schooling?* The data generated by this question were primarily obtained from semi-structured interviews and observation of the participants in their natural setting.

An overwhelming amount of data was generated by operationalization of the research question, to the extent that my making sense of the data was analogous to the task of making sense of the world—a world that is inherently unstable, fragmentary, and insecure. While not entirely identifying with existentialist angst, the experience for me, at the initial stage of the coding process, was characterized by uncertainty and no small measure of procrastination. The coding process could best be described as spiralling, in the sense that as I delved deeper into the data more and more codes were generated. At the same time, I was also forced to reflect on the difficulties that Aaron and Sarah had with reading, and was surprised at how much their experiencing of reading contrasted with my own experience as a reader (see Appendix F).

The data that were elicited highlighted the issues of achievement motivation and self-concept as a reader, and their links with parental influence, classroom structure, teacher-student interaction, peer relations, and student self-perception. Aaron and Sarah perceived themselves as incompetent readers, based on past experience (at home, and with teachers and peers) and on their personal comparisons with current peers. In general, the finding of the study was that their affective responses to schooling could not only be attributed to their self-concept as readers but were also related to their interactions with classroom structures, peers, teachers, and parents.

More specifically, the data revealed that the participants experienced some negative affective responses to schooling. Aware of their relative incompetence as readers and their self-perceived disadvantage relative to current peers, they felt anger and embarrassment and sought to avoid reading tasks. Particularly, Sarah desired to regain face with respect to past experiences of ridicule. Their avoidance of reading tasks supports Juel's (1988) finding that poor readers avoided reading partly because reading was difficult for them and partly because of their negative school experiences. With respect to motivational theory, therefore, they showed signs of having performance-oriented rather than mastery-oriented goals.

However, the two participants also displayed some positive affect towards schooling despite their self-perceived disadvantage. While not being highly efficacious students, they did display some of the behaviours consonant with efficacious students as identified

by Sewell and St. George (2000). They displayed enthusiasm and perseverance. In particular, Sarah showed a preference for the support experienced in small-group activity. In fact, Sarah rated her present school as superior to the previous school she had attended, which, albeit not highly rated in our hierarchy of schools, was a 5-year denominational school. This, in a scenario where 5- and 7-year denominational schools are rated as superior to the new sector schools, suggests that the participants did not agree with Osuji (1995) that their school—a new sector school—was a “poor” school.

The findings of the present study add to the body of literature that recognizes education as having affective aspects, and underscore the interrelationship of the roles of teachers, parents, and peers in schooling. I began this study expecting a far more negative picture of schooling from the participants than I actually got. I expected to find them so overwhelmed by their relatively low self-concept as readers and their self-perceived disadvantage relative to peers that school would be too much of a chore for them. I expected to discern a higher degree of anger, frustration, and task avoidance. My interactions with Aaron and Sarah helped me to learn something about myself as a teacher and, more specifically, about myself as a person— that I might be too quick to see the cloud rather than the silver lining.

Operationalization of the remaining research questions should elicit a clearer understanding of the perspectives on schooling of those fourth-form students who are reading-challenged.

Note

1. Throughout this paper, reference has been made to the “senior comprehensive school.” It should be noted that as of September, 2008, the designations “senior comprehensive school” and “junior secondary school” no longer obtain. In response to the recommendation of the *Education Policy Paper (1993–2003)*, de-shifting and conversion of all junior secondary and senior comprehensive schools into five-year and seven-year schools, respectively, began in 2002 and was completed by the end of September, 2008.

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APPENDIX A

Calculation of the Participants' Reading Levels Using the IRI

Source: Trinidad and Tobago. Ministry of Education. Curriculum Division. (n.d.).
Reading: Informal reading inventory-form A (pp. (i)—(ii)).

Diagnostic Reading Instrument

The Informal Reading Inventory

Manual

The Informal Reading Inventory – Form A

Description of instrument

The Informal Reading Inventory is an evaluation instrument which provides the classroom teacher with valuable insights regarding the reading strengths and needs of each student. It gives an indication of the student's instructional and independent levels of reading, and suggests the level at which frustration occurs, as well as, the level at which the child has the capacity to achieve.

A child is estimated to be reading at **Independent Level** when in the orally-based passage, he makes no more than two errors out of one hundred words of running text, and in the silently-read passage, he achieves a comprehension score of **90%**.

An **Instructional Level** is indicated if the child's word recognition errors are about five, but do not exceed nine in every one hundred words, and his comprehension scores are not less than **80%** on the orally-read passage. This is the level at which the child is capable of benefitting from instruction.

Frustration Level is evident when fluency disappears and word recognition errors abound. The child makes ten or more word recognition errors per one hundred words of running text, and scores **70%** or less on the comprehension passage.

An estimate of the **Capacity Level** is obtained when the child scores at least **75%** in comprehension on a passage that has been read to him.

Constructing the Informal Reading Inventory

To construct an inventory, two 150-word passages can be selected from graded materials for each of First Year, Second Year, Standard One and Standard Two Levels. Two 250-word passages can be selected for each of Standards Three, Four and Five. One passage is to be used for oral reading, in which miscues are identified and analyzed as the purpose

dictates. The silently-read passage is equipped with questions of literal, vocabulary, interpretive or inferential and problem-solving types, designed to test comprehension.

Direction for Administering the Inventory

Step 1 – Initiating the Inventory

To determine the entry level for reading, start with the Word Recognition List at one level below the child's present class or standard. Continue administration of the word list until the child makes six errors in succession. The last level at which he makes **70%** or more is the level at which he should begin reading.

Step II – Testing Procedures for Oral Reading

- Start by establishing rapport with the child. Tell him what is expected of him.
- Having selected the appropriate reading passage, the teacher will read the introductory statement (motivation) to the child and then ask questions designed to encourage him to think about his related experiences.
- The teacher will then ask the child to read orally and mark the oral reading errors on a response sheet.

Step III – Evaluate and record comprehension performance at the end of the oral reading. When the child's response is correct put a check mark.

APPENDIX B
Motivation to Read Profile

(i) Reading Survey

Name:

Date:

Sex:

Class:

1. My friends think I am a -----

--- a very good reader.

--- a good reader.

--- an OK reader.

--- a poor reader.

2. Reading a book is something I like to do.

--- Never

--- Not very often

--- Sometimes

--- Often

3. I read -----

--- not as well as my friends.

--- about the same as my friends.

--- a little better than my friends.

--- a lot better than my friends.

4. My best friends think reading is -----

--- really fun.

--- fun.

--- OK to do.

--- no fun at all.

5. When I come to a word I don't know, I can -----

--- almost always figure it out.

--- sometimes figure it out.

--- almost never figure it out.

--- never figure it out.

6. I tell my friends about good books I read.

--- I never do this.

--- I almost never do this.

--- I do this some of the time.

--- I do this a lot.

7. When I am reading to myself, I understand -----

--- almost everything I read.

--- some of what I read.

--- almost none of what I read.

--- none of what I read.

8. People who read are -----

--- very interesting.

--- interesting.

--- not very interesting.

--- boring.

9. I am -----

--- a poor reader.

--- an OK reader.

--- a good reader.

--- a very good reader.

10. I think libraries are -----

--- a great place to spend time.

--- an interesting place to spend time.

--- an OK place to spend time.

--- a boring place to spend time.

11. I worry about what other students think about my reading -----

--- every day.

--- almost every day.

--- once in a while.

--- never.

12. Knowing how to read well is -----

--- not very important.

--- sort of important.

--- important.

--- very important.

13. When my teacher asks me a question about what I have read, I -----

- can never think of an answer.
- have trouble thinking of an answer.
- sometimes think of an answer.

14. I think reading is -----

- a boring way to spend time.
- an OK way to spend time.
- an interesting way to spend time.
- a great way to spend time.

15. Reading is -----

- very easy for me.
- kind of easy for me.
- kind of hard for me.
- very hard for me.

16. When I grow up I will spend -----

- none of my time reading.
- very little of my time reading.
- some of my time reading.
- a lot of my time reading.

17. When I am in a group talking about stories, I -----

- almost never talk about my ideas.
- sometimes talk about my ideas.
- almost always talk about my ideas.
- always talk about my ideas.

18. I would like my teacher to read books out loud to the class ----

- every day.
- almost every day.
- once in a while.
- never.

19. When I read out loud I am a -----

- poor reader.
- OK reader.
- good reader.
- very good reader.

20. When someone gives me a book for a present, I feel -----
--- very happy.
--- sort of happy.
--- sort of unhappy.
--- unhappy.

Motivation to Read profile

(ii) Conversational Interview

Name -----

Date:

Sex:

Class:

A. Emphasis: Narrative text

Suggested prompt (designed to engage student in a natural conversation): I have been reading a good book, I was talking with ... about it last night. I enjoy talking about good stories and books that I've been reading. Today I'd like to hear about what you have been reading.

Tell me about the most interesting story or book you have read this week (or even last week). Take a few minutes to think about it. (Wait time.) Now tell me about the book or story. Probes: What else can you tell me? Is there anything else?
How did you know or find out about the story?
Why was this story interesting to you?

B. Emphasis: Informational text

Suggested prompt (designed to engage student in a natural conversation): Often we read to find out about something or to learn about something. We read for information. For example, I remember a student of mine ... who read a lot of books about ... to find out as much as he/she could about ... Now, I'd like to hear about some of the informational reading you have been reading.

Think about something important that you learned recently, not from your teacher and not from television, but from a book or some other reading material. What did you read about? (Wait time.) Tell me about what you learned. Probes: What else can you tell me?
Is there anything else?
How did you know or find out about this book/article?
Why was this book/article important to you/

C: Emphasis: General reading

Did you read anything at home yesterday? --- What?

Do you have any books at school (in your desk/storage area/ locker/ book bag) today that you are reading?---Tell me about them.

Tell me about your favorite author.

What do you think you have to learn to be a better reader?

Do you know about any books right now that you'd like to read? Tell me about them.

How did you find out about these books?

What are some things that get you really excited about reading books? Tell me about

Who gets you really interested and excited about reading books? Tell me more about what they do.

APPENDIX C

Sample Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Research Question: *Given their relatively low self-concept as a reader, how do they affectively respond to schooling?*

- How would you describe yourself as a reader?
- What kinds of things do you read?
- Explain how important reading is for you.
- Describe the earliest reading experience you can remember.
- Tell me about a reading experience you will never forget.
- Describe what reading has been like for you at this school as compared with the primary school and the junior secondary school.
- What are some of the problems you have in reading?
- How is the school helping you to overcome these problems?
- What do you consider to be your strengths in reading? What are you good at when you read?
- Explain how your reading ability is affecting your school performance.
- What difficulties are you afraid you will meet after you leave school if your reading is not up to scratch?

APPENDIX D

Letter to Participants' Parents

25th March 2004.

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a teacher at your daughter's/son's/ward's school. I write to request your daughter's/son's/ward's participation in a study that I am conducting as a requirement for the partial fulfillment of my pursuit of an M.Ed degree at the School of Education, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.

Your daughter's/son's/ward's participation will take the form of answering interview questions. Responses will be audio taped. It will also be necessary for me to assess his/her reading level.

I also request the opportunity to interview you, as well, so as to strengthen my understanding of your daughter's/son's/ward's school experiences.

Please be assured that your privacy, as well as your daughter's/son's/ward's privacy will be maintained by your anonymity. You, as well as your daughter/son/ward, are free to discontinue your participation at any time you wish.

Please indicate below whether you have read this letter and have granted your permission.

Sincerely,

Permillia Farrell (Mrs)

I _____ have read the above letter and am allowing my daughter's/son's/ward's participation in the study. I also reserve the right to withdraw this permission whenever I wish.

Signed, _____ Date:

APPENDIX E

The Coding Process

(i) Examples of Colour Coding

Legend:

Ltr	Little reading	Nop	No pleasure
Bw	Bigwords	Patt	Positive attitude
Bf	Boof	Prob	Problems
Rch	Reading a chore	Rid	Ridicule
Ctst	Cutstyle	Schn	School necessary
Dict	Dictionary	Sef	Self-efficacy
Rdif	Reading difficult	Vex	Vex
Er	Early reading	Mot	Motivation
Fr	Frequency of reading	Pl	Pleasure
Matinfl	Maternal influence	Rpref	Reading preferences

Interview with Sarah. (Tape 1- Side A & B)

Location: Dean's room

Date: 31st March 2004

Time: 10.00 a.m.

I.: Good Morning Sarah. I'm really trying to get your views on schooling - what have your experiences been like. So I'll first ask you what kinds of books do you read?

S.: Nancy Drew, Sweetville and others.

I.: Do you like reading?

S.: Not really.

I: But you said you read Nancy Drews and what is it? Sweetville?

S.: That is when I was smaller, younger.

I: Around what age so?

S.: In Form 2 and thing.

I: Who introduced you to those books?

S.: Mih teacher... Mih friends when I was going primary school because I never really used to take it up.

I: You said in the primary school, your friends read those books and you never took them on so what caused you to start reading them in Form 2?

S.: Because I had it laid up, lay down and I used to run through it. Then after I take it up seriously and I used to read it.

I: You mean you had the books lying around in your house?

S.: Yes. Yes Miss.

I: So who bought them for you?

S.: Mih mother.

I: Did she ever encourage you to read?

S.: Yes she tried but I never really like it.

I: What kinds of things she told you so in trying to encourage you to read.

S.: Reading is your future and thing and that will lead you on...that will help you in your school work and lead you like the subjects I want to do. You have to read and you must read and thing.

I: Do you agree with her that reading is important?

S.: Yes.

I: Then explain why you don't like to read.

S.: I just...do not like to read because I find that it just take up your time. I doh mind watching the TV than to sit down and read a book. And I like to play and thing. I doh really like to read. I like to be with friends. And when you reading you by yourself.

I: So, when you picked up the Nancy Drew, tell me what it has been like for you reading the Nancy Drew?

S.: It was O.K. It was kinda. It was getting shaggy and thing. Because it was kinda difficult when you reach certain parts and you couldn't pronounce the words and thing.

I: You say "shaggy." What do you mean?

S.: It was difficult. I was...you couldn't pronounce a word and you had to go and ask everybody how to pronounce it to help you and tha' was kind of difficult for me.

I: When you say you ask people what kind of people would you be asking?

S.: Mih mother and mih cousins.

Table 3. (ii) *Examples of Coding Categories*

<i>Reading as difficult</i>	<i>Affective response (negative)</i>
Big words	Cut style
Boof	Dictionary
Chore	Ridicule
Difficult	No pleasure
Frequency	
Vex	

APPENDIX F

Reflection – Memories of Reading

5th May, 2004

While I may not know all the circumstances of Aaron and Sarah's life, the more I analyse the data the more I'm amazed at how different their experiencing of reading has been from mine. It seems that for them the experience has always been fraught with difficulty.

Both Aaron and Sarah revealed that their earliest memories of reading were unpleasant and that these memories involved some measure of "boofing." This is so different from the pleasure I recall that was involved in my own earliest reading memories when it seems to me I always interfaced with text. Memories of Sundays were the pleasantest of all since it was on those days that Pappy (my maternal grandfather) would bring home the Sunday newspaper. Usually I would get the comic strip since I would rush out to meet him first and demand it. Being the youngest at the time, I was always afforded this privilege. I remember my elder sister and my youngest aunt being angry with me then,

"And yuh can't even read!" they would often angrily exclaim, but I did not care. I enjoyed hours of pleasure just looking at the pictures.

While Aaron and Sarah's earliest memories of reading involved school or some school-related activity, mine were at home. My realization that I could read was a sudden one and it occurred at home. I was, as was usual for me, thumbing through my youngest aunt's copybooks and discovered that I could read the date. I cannot remember the entire date now but the year was 1964 (I would have been five years old). I can still recall the pride I felt then at being able to read in "scribbles" (what we called writing in script).

I'm truly surprised at how Aaron and Sarah both seem to avoid reading. They only read when they have to. Neither of them has so far read an entire book for pleasure. They would start reading a book for pleasure but never finish. Aaron said that he completed reading one book but it was a book on basketball techniques. That to me is reading for information and not for pleasure. I recall that I always sought to get as much pleasurable reading as I could at primary and secondary school. When I was finally able to join the public library at age 7, I circumvented the limitation of only qualifying to borrow one book by visiting the library twice per day. That way I was able to borrow two books a day. Luckily my school was on the same street as the Public Library - Brierley Street. I would go to the library at lunchtime, hustle through the book between my afternoon assignments and, on my way home, return the book and borrow another. Soon, Ms. Moffet, the librarian noticed me and allowed me to have two pockets since she reasoned that I was borrowing two books anyway. I think too she was a little concerned about my reading during school time when I should have been doing my schoolwork. In high school in the lower forms, the same trend continued. I often hid storybooks in my

textbooks so as to be able to read undisturbed. My teachers would have been horrified at my actions then, but as a teacher now I wish I could see students doing the same. Quite frankly I think that Aaron and Sarah, by not reading for pleasure, are missing out on a good thing.