

GRADE IV STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF  
THEMSELVES AS READERS

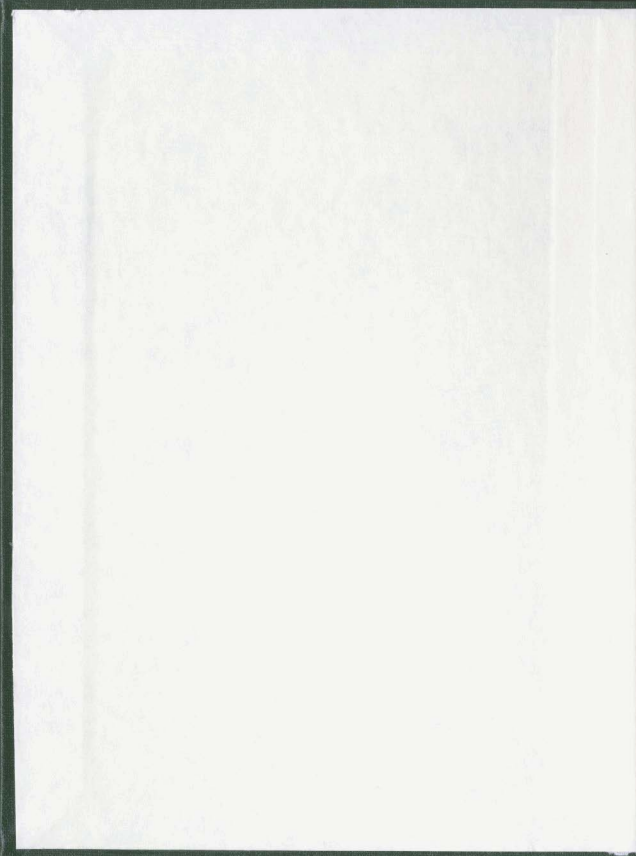
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**GRADE IV STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEMSELVES AS READERS**

By

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**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE**

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## Abstract

This study explores Grade 4 students' perceptions of themselves as readers and what factors influenced these perceptions. Grade 4 students, consisting of nine females and eight males were observed in their natural classroom setting over a seven-week period. Multiple data collection methodologies included formal and semi-formal interviews, observations, written self-assessments, a parent questionnaire, informal interviews with former teachers, and school records/data. The constant comparative method of data analysis was utilized.

The Grade 4 students viewed themselves as "good" readers. They view reading as decoding and stated that daily practice would improve their reading. The factors, which emerged as having influenced their perceptions of themselves as readers, are presented in five main categories of A) Decoding, B) Perceptions, C) Reading Affect, D) Value of Reading and E) Physical Characteristics of Print/Books.

The findings have implications for educators in the classroom. Prior to creating a classroom atmosphere and classroom instruction to best meet the needs of the students, it is necessary to understand the student's perception of him/herself as a reader and the factors which influence this perception.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Purpose of the study

In North America, emphasis in reading research over the past few decades has been placed on student's self-perceptions and perceived ability. Henk and Melnick (1998, p. 57) stated,

Over the past 35 years, numerous education researchers have examined the factors that influence children's perceptions of their own and others' reading ability (Blumenfeld, Pintrich, Meece & Wessels, 1982; Borko & Eisenhart, 1986; Canney & Winograd, 1979; Cohen, McDonell, & Osborn, 1989; Edwards, 1958, 1962; Filby & Barnett, 1982; Freppon, 1991; Gordon, 1990; Johns, 1974; Johns & Ellis, 1976; Miller & Yochum, 1991; Nicholls, 1979; Pintrich, Meece, & Wessels, 1982; Stipek & Weisz, 1981; Weintraub & Denny, 1963).

As an attempt to assess students' self-perceptions and perceived abilities, a recent focus in reading on reader attitudes and self-perceptions have led to the development of new survey scales by McKenna and Kear (1990) and Henk and Melnick (1995). While surveys may appear to provide adequate assessments of students' self-perceptions of reading, the students themselves would provide the best information through their own words.

It is the intent of this thesis to explain and describe students' perceptions of themselves as readers and what, if any, factors influence these perceptions. This qualitative research was conducted in a natural setting, a heterogeneous Grade 4

classroom. A criterion-based sample, which consisted of grade 4 students who were on the regular Language Arts program, assisted in the selection of eight males and nine females to provide a maximum variation sample. The study was conducted by the teacher as researcher and took approximately seven weeks to complete. The data was analyzed using the constant comparative method.

The purpose of the research was to explore and describe students' self-perceptions in reading and to identify what factors, if any, influence these perceptions.

### Statement of the Problem

Reading has been widely researched over the past few decades. A variety of areas within reading have been studied, many of which have focused on comprehension. The importance of attitude on reading is being more widely recognized and studied by many current researchers, such as McKenna, Kear, Henk, and Melnick. Lipson and Wixson (1991, p. 18, 1997, p. 45) have acknowledged that, "Students' attitude toward reading is a central factor affecting reading performance." McKenna and Kear (1990, p. 626) continued to report that, as far back as "1762 the great philosopher, Rousseau speculated that any method of teaching reading would suffice given adequate motivation on the part of the learner." Attitude is of vital importance in reading. Children who display a positive attitude towards reading, tend to read, whereas those children who do not display a positive attitude towards reading, tend not to engage in reading and quite often show a lack of interest.

The *English Language Arts Curriculum, Grades 4-6*, promotes the involvement of students in the assessment process. The document states, "It is important that students

participate actively in the assessment of their own learning (p. 206).” Education focuses on the development of the whole child and has as one of its goals the development of lifelong learners. In addition, the document continues, “To become lifelong learners, students need to develop internal motivation. They are more likely to perceive learning as its own reward when they are empowered to assess their own progress (p. 206).”

Motivation is a necessary component of the learning process. Individual portfolio assessment is a major focus of the new Language Arts Curriculum. Students are required to assess their reading and writing skills as well as that of their peers. They are also being taught and encouraged to assess the professional literacy in the field through novel studies, book talks, read aloud, independent reading and informal in-class discussions. Not only then is self-assessment worthwhile, but it provides an opportunity to motivate learners while simultaneously promoting life long learning. As a classroom teacher, it has been most interesting to observe students’ self-assessments. It would be even more interesting and important to explore and describe the perceptions they hold of themselves as learners in reading.

The purpose of the study was to explore and describe Grade 4 students’ perception of themselves as readers and what factors influence these perceptions. Often students’ perceptions of themselves are not accurate. Stipek (1981, p. 404) stated that, “The few extant developmental studies on children’s self-perceptions of ability have found that children’s rating of their own ability do not correlate with their actual performance (as assessed by the teacher) until third or fourth grade. She further reports that, “Previous studies conducted by Nicholls, 1978, 1979a, Stipek, et.al., found a significant relationship

between children's ratings and their own ability and the teacher's rating for children about eight or nine years of age."

Young learners in primary grades do not accurately assess their own ability but Grade 4 and upward is when students begin to accurately assess themselves as learners. Even in elementary grades, students, at times, think that they are not able to cope with a task when in fact they are able to successfully undertake this task. The reverse of that is also known to be true. Sometimes students believe that they are able to complete a task that is too difficult for them. This has been highlighted in the classroom, particularly in reading. Students will often select books that are beyond their ability and as a result will never read them. In other instances, students have chosen not to complete reading tasks as they claim they could not, when in actual fact they were able to do so. What is it then that assists students in deciding whether or not they are or are not able to handle a literacy task? What perception do students have of themselves and what factors influence these perceptions?

This study will attempt to explore and describe Grade 4 students' perceptions of themselves in relation to reading and the factors, if any, that influence these perceptions. The qualitative research was constructive in nature and was conducted in a Grade 4 classroom setting with Grade 4 students. The *English Language Arts Curriculum, Grades 4-6* provides the learning outcomes for the Grade 4 program. Much emphasis is placed on reading, which includes both, anthologies and the use of children's literature books. The *Assessment Handbook* provides a student reading attitude survey. This survey is designed using a Likert scale, which to a degree may stifle the students thoughts, feelings and perceptions they have of themselves. Students have the option of agreeing,

disagreeing or somewhere in between. Such response on a Likert scale does not provide an accurate or complete picture of the students' attitudes, feelings and perceptions. As reported by Smith & Ryan (1997, p. 271),

Numerous studies (eg., Heathington & Alexander, 1978; Noland & Craft, 1976; Reeves & Thames, 1994; Roettger, 1980) have focused on attitudes toward reading and how to measure such attitudes. In these studies, little attention focused on the differential impact of survey format on attitudes.

They continued, "The present study examined the joint effects of attitude survey format and language arts achievement level on attitudes toward reading." They posited that, "The results imply that attitude responses of adolescents can be manipulated by varying the format of the survey."

In addition to using surveys, students should be given the opportunity to state their perceptions and feelings in order to obtain more meaningful and accurate results.

Recent research by McKenna and Kear (1990) and Henk and Meltrick (1995) has produced tools available for use by teachers such as a "Reading Attitude Survey" and the "Reader Self-Perception Scale" survey, which also uses the Likert scale. Feedback from these surveys may be used for instruction planning or assessment. Once again, however, these surveys do not provide a complete and accurate picture of the students' perceptions of themselves as readers.

To ensure maximum literacy growth in the classroom, it is important to structure the classroom in the best possible manner. To do this, it is necessary for teachers and educators to listen to what students think and feel about how they perceive themselves as

readers and what factors influence these perceptions. Information from survey scales needs to be supplemented by students' comments or discussions of their own perceptions.

The data collected and analyzed in this study may provide new knowledge, expand on current knowledge and even initiate further research. It has the potential of assisting educators in the facilitation of students' learning so they reach their maximum potential in reading. In addition, as a classroom teacher, it may encourage one to reflect on current teaching practices and methodologies within their classroom. The outcome of the study may be shared with colleagues within a school or at Board level, as a means of encouraging and promoting teachers to be reflective in their teaching practice.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

As Johns & VanLeirsburg (1994, p. 91) state, "A lifelong love of reading is a highly desired outcome of reading instruction." Many factors influence reading. Thoughts and beliefs about one's ability can influence learning. Thoughts and beliefs about ability and effort can motivate or deter learners. These beliefs can and have been known to produce both positive and negative outcomes, by directly influencing students' behavior. Henk and Melnick (1992, p. 111) state that, "An individual's perception of self as a reader might affect whether opportunities to read would be sought or avoided, the amount of effort that would be expended during reading, and the degree of persistence demonstrated in pursuing text comprehension." As a reader forms these self-estimates of his/her capabilities as a reader, it is believed that he/she considers their perceptions of a wide array of indicators. As reported by Schunk, 1985, Henk & Melnick (1992, p. 111) continue that,

These indicators are thought to include: past personal reading performance, the degree of ongoing progress, the relative performance of peers, the difficulty or ease of various reading tasks, feedback from credible sources, the quality of reading instruction they have received, internal physiological responses to reading, and situational circumstances such as teacher assistance, mode of reading, and working conditions.

Throughout the study as the participants stated their perceptions of themselves as readers and as they were observed in their daily reading activities, many of these same indicators were revealed.

### Affect in Reading

Research in the past decade or two has focused on affective factors in reading. Athey (1985, p.527) stated that, "There is probably little disagreement today, even among the most fervent advocates of a cognitive-linguistic view of reading, that affective factors play a role both in reading achievement and reading behavior." Athey (1985) and Mathewson (1985) believe that a movement toward greater consideration of affective influences in reading achievement is long overdue but somewhat understandable.

As well, current research in reading by researchers and reading educators have shown renewed interest in how affective factors influence children's academic achievement and behavior (Alvermann & Guthrie, 1993).

Research in the affective domain has uncovered the notion that students who have made positive associations with reading tend to read more frequently, for extended periods of time, and with greater intensity. Conversely, when children experience negative feelings about their reading, achievement tends to suffer (Henk & Melnick, 1995). Their peers and teachers view avid readers as the "better" readers as they avail of more opportunities to read. In addition the avid readers bring along books to discuss and share. They tend to have knowledge of a variety of books, which they often bring to school to read. Anderson, Fielding & Wilson (1988) and Foertsch (1992) believed that this deeper reading engagement translated into superior reading achievement.

In Henk & Melnick's study (1998) of upper elementary-aged children's reported perceptions about "good readers," the category affect was constructed and included amount of reading, enjoyment, and recreational reading. They believe that the construct of affect is based on the premise that children who genuinely like to read will generally read more often. From a teacher's perspective, this is evident in the classroom as well. The students who have developed a love of or a joy for reading are generally the more avid readers.

Mathewson (1985, 1994) examined the role of affect in reading behavior. He proposed a model in which four affective factors interact with cognitive processes during reading. These four factors in Mathewson's "Affective Model of Reading" include attitude, motivation, affect and physical feelings. He went on to predict that each of these affective factors influence the reading process.

Ruddell and Spieker (1985) also recognized the importance of affect and included it, to a lesser degree than Mathewson, in their interactive reading process model.

Studies have confirmed the role these affective states have on reading, especially that of attitude and motivation. Wigfield and Guthrie (1997) explored different aspects of children's reading motivation and how children's motivation related to the amount and breadth of their reading. They concluded that reading motivation is multifaceted and found that motivation predicted children's reading amount and breadth even when previous amount and breadth were controlled.

Walberg and Tsai (1985) studied correlates of reading achievement and attitude among nine year olds. The results indicated a significant correlation between attitude and achievement in reading.

Lipson and Wixson, (1991, p. 18, 1997, p. 45) state that, "Students' attitudes towards reading is a central factor affecting reading performances."

Roettger (1980) reported the results of a study in which noticeable differences were revealed in expectations of reading when good and poor readers expressed their attitudes towards reading. Children who read well had negative attitudes towards reading and those who did not read well had positive attitudes as revealed by the "Estes Attitude Scale: Elementary Form." Additionally, the readers had different expectations of reading. The low attitude/high performers stated that reading was important to their self concept; it made them "smarter," whereas the high attitude/low performers viewed reading as important for survival; to get good grades in school, to obtain information and to be able to read street signs. Roettger continued with the idea that we should listen to students and determine what their attitudes towards reading are. He stated that, "Sometimes elementary students who have a good attitude toward reading nevertheless have difficulty with it, and others who read very well have little interest in reading (p. 451)." While this may be true in some situations, it is more the exception than the rule. Conversely, Teale (1983, p. 3) stated, "One characteristic of individuals who do choose to read is their positive attitude toward reading."

The importance of affective factors on reading has great implications for students and educators. The overall goal of reading is to have students who are both capable readers as well as enthusiastic and avid readers. As Huck (1973, p. 305) stated,

If we teach a child to read, yet develop not the taste for reading, all of our teaching is for naught. We shall have produced a nation of "illiterate literates: - those who know how to read but do not read.

From these studies of the various affective states, it appears evident that awareness of and emphasis on attitude and motivation specifically, along with other affective factors, are important in the teaching of reading. As Teale (1983, p.3) stated, "Thus if a goal of schools is to develop students who both can and want to read (and I think it is), educators need to pay special attention to the extent to which the taste for reading is fostered." To turn students on to reading, to get them actively involved in the reading process and self-assessment and to create in them a lifelong love of and desire to read, it is crucial that teachers and educators become knowledgeable of the impact that affect has on students' reading. McKenna and Kear (1990) devised a new tool, the Elementary Reading Attitude Survey (ERAS), for measuring attitude towards reading, both recreational and academic reading. Such a tool may assist teachers in determining the attitude levels of their students as well as initiating informal assessment efforts into the role attitude plays in a student's development as a reader.

Kline (1994, p. 16) stated that,

The affective domain is so vast and complex. If you mean to work in it, you must believe in it. Try to conceptualize its vastness and complexity, then accept it all the way to its infinite ends. It is not words we read: it is joy and pain, exhilaration and despair, hate and love, wisdom and stupidity, facts and fiction, and fantasy and faith.

Henk and Melnick (1995, p. 470) state that, "As a result our longheld intuitions about the powerful impact that attitudes, values, beliefs, desires, and motivations exert on literacy learning have begun to receive the focused attention they deserve."

### Self-concept

Psychologists and educators have been interested in the concept, 'self' for decades. Wigfield and Karpathian (1991, p. 233) state,

William James (1890/1963) was one of the first psychologists to discuss the sense of self, or self-concept. He made the important distinction between the 'self as knower' and the 'self as object,' with the latter defined as an individual's self-concept.

Other theories of self-concept have since evolved and have viewed how individuals' self-concepts are influenced by how others view them. Cooley coined the fascinating term, 'looking-glass self' to refer to this type of self-concept. Such theories involve social interactions forming the basis for the development of one's self-concept. Children's comparisons of themselves with others provide normative information about their skills, talents and interests (Wigfield & Karpathian, 1991). During reading activities and throughout the reading process, children quite often compare their ability to that of their peers. They believe that if their peers are able to complete the reading task, then they are as well.

Self-concept is thought to be a multi-dimensional construct (Byrne, 1984; Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Wigfield & Karpathian, 1991). The various domains of self-concept considered by these researchers included academic, social and physical.

Clearly research indicates that young children in Kindergarten and Grade 1 can and do make self-concept related differentiation both across and within domains (Chapman & Tunmer, 1995).

Studies conducted in the academic domain have shown that children's perceptions are differentiated across a range of self-concept domains, such as math and reading (Eccles, Wigfield, Harold & Blumenfeld, 1993). They further reported that Grade 1 children were also able to distinguish between competence perceptions and subjective task values within each of those academic self-concept areas. Marsh, Craven & Debus (1991) also found that competence perception in various domains, such as reading, math, physical ability and peer relationships were clearly differentiated even in Kindergarten.

Current definitions of self-concept are similar to that of James and define self-concept as a person's perceptions of him/herself (Rosenberg, 1979; Shavelson, Hubner & Stanton, 1976). These perceptions and thoughts of self are formed through experiences within and interpretations of one's environment (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985; Shavelson, Hubner & Stanton, 1976), and are heavily influenced by reinforcements and evaluations by significant other persons as well as one's attributions for one's behavior (Shavelson & Bolus, 1982).

Numerous studies have indicated a positive relationship between self-concept and reading achievement (Chapman & Tunmer, 1995; Pottebaum, Keith, & Ehly, 1986) and self-concept and performance (Johnson 1981; Thomas & Hartley, 1980).

### Reader Self-concept

Reader self-concept is a fairly new term and has been used interchangeably in the research literature with reader self-perception. Reader self-concept as defined by Valencia (1990) is one's evaluation of "self as reader."

Chapman & Tunmer (1995) defined and explored three sub-components within the reading area of academic self-concept: perceptions of competence in reading, perceptions of difficulty with reading and attitudes towards reading.

The first component within the reader's self-concept, perceptions of competence, involves one's beliefs regarding ability and proficiency in reading tasks. Studies have positively linked feelings and beliefs towards reading to improved reading performance. One such study by Wagner, Spratt, Gal and Paris (1989) studied Moroccan school children and their results indicated a significant pattern of relations between belief and reading performance.

Perceptions of difficulty within reading refer to beliefs that reading activities are hard or problematic. Generally, students are aware of the fact that a reading task is difficult but not all students are able to identify the problem or employ strategies themselves to address their difficulty.

Attitudes towards reading, attitude being an affective component of reading self-concept, involve feelings toward and affinity for reading. Currently, there is an increasing emphasis on attitude towards reading and its positive impact, by numerous researchers in the field of reading (Athey, 1985; Henk & Melnick, 1992, 1995, 1998; McKenna, 1994; McKenna & Kear, 1990; Mathewson, 1985; Walberg & Tsai, 1985).

Chapman & Tunmer (1995, p. 155) stated that, "An examination of these 3 sub-components of a specific area of academic self-concept represents a new conceptualization of school-related self-perceptions." As reading is deemed so important in the first few years of school and quite often the most focused learning activity, reading self-concept was selected as the focus for their study.



While research has not determined that a positive reader self-concept causes improved achievement or vice versa, Pottebaum, Keith and Ehly (1986) posited that while reciprocal causation seems likely for self-concept and achievement, the magnitude of the effect may be too small to detect.

### Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is yet another indicator of personal expectancy as it involves the judgements of capability. Self-efficacy as defined by Bandura (1977, 1986) is, "People's judgements of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances."

Schunk (1991, p.210) stated that, "The theory has since been expanded to include perceived capabilities to control such self-referent activities as cognitive processes, emotions and self-regulated behaviors." A more current definition of self-efficacy refers to self-efficacy as confidence in one's capability for organizing and implementing the cognitive, behavioral or social skills necessary for successful performance of a task (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 1991).

Self-efficacy theory holds that the best predictors of behavior in specific situations are individuals' self-perceptions within those situations (Bandura, 1993; Schunk, 1989b). These self-efficacy beliefs affect what students do by influencing the choices they make, the effort they expend, the persistence and perseverance they exert in the face of adversity and the anxiety they experience (Bandura, 1993; PaJares & Valiante, 1997; Weiner,

1985). The self-efficacy theory posits that changes in self-concept may be linked to changes in achievement and effort (Gorrell, 1990).

Students acquire information about their level of efficacy from four areas: self-performances, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and physiological indices (Bandura 1977, 1982; Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Schunk 1984).

Performance accomplishments, (i.e., experiences of personal mastery), are the most powerful source of personal information leading to greater expectations of mastery and success (Bandura 1977; Gorrell 1990). Studies have shown that successful experiences in reading raise a student's level of efficacy, whereas frequent or constant failures in reading lower it. Bandura (1986) promoted the notion that successes raise efficacy and failure lowers it, but once a strong sense of efficacy is developed, a failure may not have much impact. McElroy, Goetze & Beach (1997, p. 177) state that, "If children are successful with the tasks that are presented, they see themselves as capable members of the school literacy community."

Vicarious experiences are another means in which students acquire information about their level of efficacy. Such experiences provide individuals with coping and mastery upon which to base their own actions (Gorrell, 1990). Other researchers have also found that exposure to successful models raises individuals' beliefs that they can perform the modeled behavior (Bandura 1977; McAuley 1985; Zimmerman & Ringle 1981).

Verbal persuasion, more currently referred to as "social feedback" (Henk & Melnick 1992, 1993, 1995; Schunk 1983b) consists of direct and indirect cues which are derived from teachers, classmates and family, and include such statements as, "You can

do this." Bandura (1977) considered this to be the weaker method of changing efficacy beliefs. Readers may be encouraged by others to read but unless this is confirmed by consistent and continued performance accomplishments, then the reader quickly disengages. As Schunk (1991, p. 208) stated, "Positive persuasory feedback enhances self-efficacy, but this increase will be temporary if subsequent efforts turn out poorly."

The final area in the efficacy theory model in which one derives efficacy information is physiological indexes. Emotional arousal is an indicator to the student that he/she is not coping well in the situation, which may inhibit performance attempts. Individuals tend to associate emotional arousal, such as anxiety, stress, fear and other such forms of discomfort as signs of personal incapacity (Bandura 1977; Gorrell 1990). These four factors in the self-efficacy theory model used in making reader judgements do not operate in isolation of one another (Marshall & Weinstein, 1985).

Studies conducted have positively linked self-efficacy to achievement (Lent, Brown & Larkin 1984; Norwich 1985; Relich, Debus & Walker, 1986). It is not surprising then as reported by Gorrell (1990), that other studies (Campbell & Hackett, 1986; Hackett & Campbell, 1987; Lyman, Prentice-Dunn, Wilson & Bonifilio, 1984) related to school failure and success have shown that students' self-efficacy ratings tend to decrease following failure and to increase following success.

Henk and Melnick (1995) introduced the term, "reader self-efficacy," a psychological construct which coincides with Bandura's definition of self-efficacy. A "Reader Self-Perception Scale" (RSPS) was devised to determine how elementary age children feel about themselves as readers. Such an understanding of students' perceptions is important as this can affect the students' "reader self-efficacy." As started by Shell,

Colvin & Bruning (1995) self-efficacy is affected by the perceptions students have of themselves. Self perceptions are likely to either motivate or inhibit learning (Bandura, 1977, 1982; Henk & Melnick, 1995; Schunk, 1982, 1983a, 1983b; Zimmerman & Ringle, 1981).

### Research of Student Perceptions

The research, which has examined students' perceptions, has emerged from two domains – work on metacognition and strategic learning and work in the area of attribution theory achievement motivation and learned helplessness (Johnson & Winograd, 1985).

Metacognition involves learners planning, monitoring, and evaluating the activities, which have to be carried out for learning to occur, and utilizing the processes necessary for this new knowledge. Winograd and Paris (1988) referred to metacognition in general terms to include self-appraisal and self-management of cognition. They posit that these twin components of metacognition are influenced by affective factors, such as a student's beliefs, values and effort.

In relation to reading, Gordon (1990, p. 1) defined metacognitive knowledge “As knowledge about the reader’s characteristics, the tasks they face, the reading strategies they employ and, the nature of materials with which they work.”

In order for learning to occur, the learner must be actively aware of their thinking and know when and which strategies to use, which poor learners lack, but can be taught. Cohen, McDonnell & Osborn (1989) support this in their study of 131 first graders on the influence of “Reading Recovery” on children’s self-perceptions. They compared

“Reading Recovery” students with other at-risk students and high-ability students. The results indicated that the “Reading Recovery” students perceive themselves to be competent and in control of their learning. This suggests that “Reading Recovery” increased ability and effort attributions as well as self-efficacy. Normally, good readers gradually develop or already possess these self-help skills at age appropriate levels, but poor learners do not. Baker and Brown (1984) posited that a correlation exists between metacognition and reading performance. Ehrlich, Kurtz-Costes & Loridan (1993) in their study of cognitive and motivational determinants of reading comprehension in good and poor readers found that good readers possessed richer metacognitive knowledge and held more positive beliefs about their academic abilities than did poor readers.

Other studies have indicated that metacognitive knowledge and comprehension monitoring became more efficient with age and within a grade level, with good and poor readers differed on reading-related metacognitive skills (Baker, 1984; Garner & Kraus, 1982). The notion that children’s metacognition about reading emerges slowly and develops considerably between the ages of 6 and 12 was expressed by Garner (1987). A study of reading and believing, by Wagner, Spratt, Gal & Paris, (1989) confirmed that metacognition beliefs were more strongly related to reading performance of older children than of younger children. Analysis showed that causal attributions were more strongly related to reading performance in older children.

Blumenfeld, Pintrich, Meece and Wessels (1982, p. 401) in their study on the formation and role of self-perceptions of ability in elementary classrooms, state that, “Formulations were guided by Weiner’s Attribution Theory, which proposes that an individual’s interpretation of the causes of success and failure influences future

achievement-oriented behavior." Attributions are perceived causes of outcomes (Schunk, 1991; Weiner, 1985). Attribution theorists assume that individuals seek to understand and explain the causes of significant events (Schunk, 1991; Stipek, 1988; Weiner, 1979).

Perceptions of the cause of achievement outcomes are known as causal attributions and they are most commonly made in achievement situations in reference to ability and effort (Stipek, 1988; Weiner, 1979). Other causes have also been identified to include task difficulty and luck (Blumenfeld, 1992; Blumenfeld, Pintrich, Meece & Wessels, 1982; Stipek, 1988; Weiner, 1979). When students believe that they have the ability to accomplish a task, they are more likely to do so than those who do not believe they have the ability. Children in elementary grades 4-6 are more likely to attribute performance to ability and less likely to attribute their achievement to luck and effort (Nicholls, 1979; Ruble, Boggiano, Feldman & Loebel, 1980). Blumenfeld et. al (1982, p. 402) continue, "Consequently, this theory postulates that ability perceptions mediate achievement behavior." Schunk (1984) reports that it is the students' perceptions about the causes of success and failure that affects performances and not merely the success or failure in and of themselves. Henk & Melnick (1995) felt that in reading, self-perceptions could impact upon an individual's overall orientation toward the process itself. Stipek and Tannat's (1984, p. 75) study of children's judgements of their own and their peers academic competence, stated that, "Despite agreement that it is important for children to develop and maintain a positive view of their own ability, little is known about the criteria young children use to assess competence."

Student perceptions have been highlighted in the research area of reading, but much of this research is dated. Much of the earlier research focused on perception of

one's own and peers' reading ability and strategy use. Rosenholtz and Wilson (1980) focused their study on "best and worst" readers as perceived by the students while Clements, Gainey & Malitz (1980) focused on how students define good readers and identify "better readers in their classroom." Similarly, Filby and Barnett (1982) examined elementary students' perceptions of better readers. Teale (1983) reported in his study on assessing attitudes toward reading, the why and how, that children's perceptions of themselves as readers have been shown to have an effect on reading performance.

Children's views of themselves as readers and the strategies they use to 'fix' reading problems are rarely if ever considered (Wixson, Peters, Weber & Roeber, 1987; Valencia & Pearson, 1988; Valencia, Pearson, Peters & Wixson, 1989). However, there has been a recent shift in that direction. More current research interested in literacy development has examined perceptions as a way to understand the difficulty students' experience as they learn to read (Miller & Yochum, 1991) and what if any strategies they employ.

These perceptions influence what happens in reading and other activities in the classroom. The way a reader views himself has been referred to as "perception of self as reader," (Valencia, 1990; Winograd & Paris, 1988). Reader self-perception is a social learning theory term and is used interchangeably with reader self-concept. As well, reader self-perception and reader attitude has been used interchangeably in some of the research literature. Pink (1996) reported in her study that although it was shown that there is indeed a relationship between reading attitude and reader self-perception, the relationship needs to be clarified.

Initially, studies of students' perceptions in reading examined reading difficulties and whether or not inaccurate knowledge or lack of knowledge of the reading process affected the acquisition of reading skills and as a result desire to read (Canney & Winograd, 1979; Edwards 1962; Harste, 1978a, 1978b). Effective readers viewed reading as related to comprehension whereas poor readers viewed reading as related to decoding (Edwards, 1962; Yochum & Miller, 1991). Other studies involving elementary students' perception of reading found that students were unaware that the purpose for reading was comprehension but viewed decoding or word recognition as being most important in the process (Borko & Eisenhart, 1986; Johns & Ellis, 1976; Miller & Yochum, 1991; Wixson, Bosky, Yochum, & Alverman, 1984).

Yochum & Miller (1990, p. 159) state that, "This lack of attention to students' perceptions has occurred despite research evidence suggesting that attitudes and beliefs, as well as metacognitive strategies are important parts of the reading process." Affect has been difficult to measure. Unfortunately, because affect tends to be difficult to measure, the tools necessary to make truly valid appraisals have not been available (Henk & Melnick, 1993).

More recent research has focused on reader self-perception. Gordon (1990) briefly studied reader self-perception in conjunction with other aspects of reading and writing. Gordon found that, students' perceptions of themselves were accurate when compared to the teacher's judgements of them as being poor, fair or good readers. She stated that, "Students based their perceptions on the quality of their oral reading, the amount of reading they did, the speed at which they read and their overall level of enjoyment of reading as an activity (p. 6)."



Younger children, (e.g., primary aged children) do not accurately state their academic performance and tend to rate it by their effort. They view effort, ability and outcome as being the same. As Blumenfeld, Pintrich, Meece, and Wessels (1982, p. 404) state, "In level four (approximately 11 years) children separate ability, effort, and outcome and they understand that effort and ability can both determine outcome." Nicholls (1978) also supported this.

#### Students' Perceptions - Developmental Differences

As children participate in classroom activities they begin to develop a perception of themselves as literate individuals at school (Young 1996). Students' perceptions, as they relate to ability, change. As students move through the various grade levels, their perceptions of themselves and their perception of their ability in them as readers change. Chapman and Tunmer (1995) referred to these changes as development differences. Nicholls, (1978) supports this in his study and found that children develop in four phases.

The first phase includes children in Kindergarten and grade 1, approximately age 6 and younger, who do not distinguish between ability, effort, and outcome. At this age children hold the belief that students who try harder, are smarter than those who do not try as hard. They also believe that students get higher scores because they are smarter and work harder than students who get lower scores.

Phase two involves students in grades 2 and 3, ages 7 and 8, who view effort and outcome separately. They believe that a greater effort will produce a greater outcome, regardless of ability. Ability or lack of is not viewed as important towards outcome.

The third phase includes grade 4 students, approximately ages 9 – 11. Ability is perceived as a mediator of effort outcome, but not consistently. Ability and effort are confounded with the belief that harder workers are smarter.

In the final phase, grade 5 and beyond, age 11, students begin to separate ability, effort, and outcome. Effort and ability are viewed as determinants of outcome.

Stipek (1981) reported that Kindergarten and grade 1 students used work habits to judge ability, while grade 2 and 3 students considered the accomplishment of specific tasks. An example of this would be, “I can do hard work, I can read.”

A study by Stipek and Tannat (1984) of 4 – 8 year old children and how they judge their own and their classmates’ abilities, found that children at all age levels frequently explained ability judgements in terms of effort or work habits.

Stipek (1993) and Weiner (1985) contend that younger students tend to equate effort and ability as causes and elementary age students see effort and ability as inversely related.

Developmental differences in students’ perceptions as they relate to ability in reading are important and should be considered by teachers and educators as they work with students in reading as well as all school activities. Research has show that these changes in perceptions of ability are related to achievement (Ehrlich, Kurtz-Costes & Loridan, 1993; Shell, Bruning and Colvin, 1995; Wagner, Spratt, Gal & Paris, 1989).

Johnston (1986) contends that in order to assist the student with the reading process, we need to first understand the student’s view of it. In order to accomplish this monumental task and be better able to assist readers in reaching their potential, instructor practices must be adjusted. The learner must be an active participant in this new reading

process. This has great implications for students, educators, and teachers as it relates to current theories of reading, models of reading and assessments in reading. Much research has been undertaken and literature written in an attempt to recommend reading assessment to coincide with current theories, views and as well current instruction of the reading process (Henk & Rickleman, 1992; Roeber & Dutcher, 1989; Valencia & Pearson, 1988; Valencia, Pearson, Peters, Wixson, 1989; Wixson, Peters, Weber & Roeber, 1987).

### Self-assessment

Current methods of teaching emphasize student self-assessment. An increased emphasis on self-evaluation exists in all areas of literacy. The current *English Language Arts Curriculum, Grades 4-6* has included a student "Reading Attitude Survey" in its Assessment Handbook. McKenna and Kear (1990) and Henk and Melnick (1995) have developed "Reader Self-Perception Scales" which are instruments for measuring students' attitudes towards reading and how they perceive themselves as readers. All three of these reading surveys are designed based on the Likert scale model and include four or five nodes.

McKenna and Kear (1990, p. 626) state that, "The focus of recent research and development in assessment has been comprehension rather than attitude." They further state that, "The recent emphasis on enhanced reading proficiency has often ignored the important role played by children's attitudes in the process of becoming literate."

McKenna and Kear's "Elementary Reading Attitude Survey" (ERAS), is a tool that measures elementary students' attitudes towards school-based curriculum and

recreational reading. This pictorial, four-node Reading Scale utilizes pictures of Garfield which appeals to children and which makes it suitable to the very young.

Henk and Melnick's (1992, 1993, 1995) Reader Self-Perception Scale was devised based on Bandura's (1977, 1982) theory of perceived self-efficacy. Self-perceptions can either encourage or deter readers. O'Flahaven, et. al (1992, p. 12) state that, "Perhaps this is why in a recent national poll, teachers ranked motivating students and creating an interest in reading as their first priority."

Students who view reading positively tend to read more often. They avail of opportunities to engage in a wide range of reading activities as well as a wide variety of reading materials. As a result they experience success in reading. Children, who perceive reading negatively, tend to avoid it and their achievement suffers, as does their sense of self-efficacy.

Henk and Melnick's instrument called "Reader Self-Perception Scale" (RSPS) is similar to that of McKenna and Kear's ERAS. This instrument also focuses on the affective domain as it measures how children feel about themselves as readers. Both the ERAS and the RSPS exhibit validity and reliability. Henk and Melnick (1995) promote that the new scale can be administered to groups of students for the purposes of instruction, assessment, and research, and it provides data on affect that make individual reading evaluations more complete.

These instruments have the potential of being useful in the classroom but these materials alone are not enough. Discussions with the students must accompany such instruments if teachers are to understand exactly how the students feel and what it is they

need or perceive they need to assist them with their reading. Valencia and Pearson (1987, p. 728) have stated that,

The best possible assessment of reading would seem to occur when teachers observe and interact with students as they read authentic texts for genuine purposes. As teachers interact with students, they evaluate the way in which the students orchestrate resources to construct meaning, intervening to provide support or suggestions when the students appear on the verge of faltering in their attempt to build a reasonable model of the meaning of the text.

Henk and Melnick (1995, p. 471) say that, "In reading, self-perceptions can impact upon an individual's overall orientation toward the process itself." To understand and make sense of these self-perceptions and how or what impact they have, the students themselves would have to describe.

#### Research Question

A review of the literature indicates that, until recently, there has not been much current substantive research conducted in the area of student perception in reading and that much of the research in reading recently has focused on comprehension. The affective domain, being more difficult to assess, has been ignored. In recent years, however, educators and reading researchers have begun to make progress in measuring affective elements pertinent to reading by devising the instruments "Elementary Reading Attitude Survey" (ERAS) and the "Reading Self-Perception Scale" (RSPS).

Students are more active participants in their learning today and they are increasingly playing a more active role in self-assessment. Individual portfolio

assessments are incorporated in the current *English Language Arts Curriculum, Grades 4-6*. The students are now forced to focus on their perception of self as reader.

Such new instruments to measure students' perceptions of themselves as readers are a great beginning. To add to these reader attitude and self-perception scales, the students themselves should be given the opportunity to describe their feelings and perceptions as they relate to reading.

The research questions to be asked in this study are:

- 1. How do Grade IV students describe their perceptions of themselves as readers?**
- 2. What factors in the children's view influence the perceptions they have of themselves as readers?**

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Design

Prior to commencing the study, written consent was obtained from the Avalon East School Board, Director, Mr. B. Shortall, (see Appendix B), School Principal, Mrs. J. Skinner, (see Appendix C), and the parents and students (see Appendix D). To protect the anonymity of all students involved in the study, pseudonyms were assigned for both the students and the school.

The above parties were informed of the purpose for the study and provided with the assurance of confidentiality. They were made aware that the following precautions would be taken: 1) Pseudonyms would be used in place of real names for the students to ensure confidentiality, 2) Taped interviews would be destroyed within one year of completion of the study, 3) The results would be made available to all participants who requested them upon completion of the study and, 4) Students would have the option of withdrawing from the study at any time.

The research design for this study focused on what Glaser & Strauss (1967) referred to as a new qualitative methodology called 'grounded theory.' Spector (1984, p. 460) defined grounded theory.

In this method the data gathered during the study direct the design of each step of the study as it evolves. The categories, themes, and subsequent hypotheses that emerge are "grounded" (have their initial foundation) in the data themselves. This process is used for hypothesis testing. The proposed outcome of this research

method is the generation of hypotheses, which will eventually be tied together in theory. The procedure is suitable for social units of any size, ranging from men and nations to small organizational units such as a science class in a school.

The study focused on grade 4 students' perceptions of themselves as readers. To gain insight into the students' thoughts, feelings and experiences, the Naturalistic Research Paradigm was used to observe and interview grade 4 students in their classroom environment as they worked and socialized. An attempt was made to construct meaning, both socially and personally, by the teacher while functioning in the dual 'teacher as researcher' role.

Carr and Kemmis (1986, p. 162) state that this research role is:

Simply a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve rationality and justice of their own practices, their understanding of these practices and the situation in which the practices are carried out.

Tite (1986, p. 5) states that, "In the case of schools, action research implies co-investigation of problems which have relevance for both teachers and researchers." She further states that, "Action research attempts to address the teacher's practical problems while contributing to the learning goals of the researcher (p. 5)."

Berlin (1990, p.9) states that, "The aim of this research then is not primarily to publish but to enable the teacher to understand her students by using research methods that will identify their characteristics as learners."

Teachers are encouraged to focus and reflect on their teaching practices and student learning on an on-going basis. Conducting research in one's own classroom is



one method of promoting such focus and reflection. As an insider conducting research, there is direct access to data that an outsider doing research would not have, such as, knowledge about the students, parents, family backgrounds, and discussions and comments from other teachers who have worked with the participants and their families. As Johnston (1992, p. 37) stated, "What I am saying is that we have knowledge that others who are mere observers could never know." She further states that, "The current literature on teacher research as well as my own experience tells me that this kind of privileged information is advantageous; it fosters description made from a perspective that outsiders could not have (p. 37)."

Consideration was given as to the benefits of the research from the point of view of the participants, the researcher and as well for the advancement of knowledge. The teacher-researcher was aware of and considered any possible risk to the participants and to one's self and ensured that no harm was done to either. The teacher is governed by a code of ethics in the teaching profession, which covered her in the dual role of teacher as researcher in this study.

### Participants

"Criterion Based Sampling" was utilized to obtain participants from DLS Elementary, for the study. DLS Elementary is an inner city school and consists of a population of students who come from a lower socioeconomic background. Upon entering Kindergarten many of these students are functioning well below the 'normal' age appropriate level both socially and academically. In comparison to their peers in this and other schools, many of these children are physically smaller. Often times, these students

commence school with a lack of readiness in language development. The larger percentage of these children come from home environments that are lacking in receptive and expressive language experiences. They have been deprived of a rich background in children's literature. Many of these students have not heard or listened to the more familiar fairy tales or nursery rhymes. Home assistance is not always available as many of the parents and families are either illiterate or are lacking in their own academic development. In addition, the majority of these families have more negative than positive memories of their own school days, whereby they did not experience success. Formal test scores in both Language and Math have presented data, which indicated that many of these students are functioning below their peers at both the district and provincial levels. McElroy, Goetze & Beach (1997, p. 179) stated that, "Teachers' attitudes thus become keys to breaking the cycle for students who are at-risk of not achieving their academic learning potential." Lyons & Beaver (1995, p. 124) expressed, "Teachers must realize that these at-risk children need accelerated experiences and twice as much exposure to print as the peer group." McElroy, Goetze & Beach (1997, p. 179) continues with the idea that,

Teachers may effectively support children in escaping from this on-going cycle by replacing previous misconceptions with a belief that views these students, not as deficient, but as having a need to gain diverse literacy experiences, and by providing school literacy experience designed to fulfill the needs of the children for accelerated, content rich instructions.

Johnston & Allington (1991) advocate that the cycle can be broken if the teacher viewed all children as coming to school with varied literacy experiences and builds on each child's unique backgrounds.

Prior to the recruitment of participants, the grade 4 class at DLS Elementary was informed of the purpose for the study, the nature of confidentiality involved and that participation was voluntary. They were also informed that should they agree to participate, they would be free to leave the study at any time or would have the option of refusing to answer questions at any time. It was also stressed up front in the recruitment process that participation in the study would not affect their academic grades in this or successive school years.

The criteria that was utilized for the selection of participants was that the students were in grade 4 in the school year 1998-99 and that they were on the prescribed program for Language Arts. To ensure a mixture of students and to obtain a purposive sample, all twenty-two students in the grade 4 class were invited to participate. The initial intent was to reduce the population and make the study more feasible by selecting a maximum variation sample of 10-12 students. A maximum variation sample is intended to be broadly representative of a larger population. In considering the time frame of seven weeks in which the study was to be conducted, and the high rate of absenteeism within the class, the decision was made to accept the 17 students who volunteered as participants to participate in the study.

All students returned a signed participant consent form (see Appendix D). Most of the participants created their own pseudonym. Those who did not select their own pseudonym or those who chose to keep their own name were later provided with one by

the teacher-researcher in order to protect their identity. Due to the age of the participants, the parents were also informed of the purpose of the study and signed a parent consent form (see Appendix D).

The participants consisted of eight males and nine females; five of which were high average; six were average; five were low average and one student had repeated grade 4 and was performing in the average to low average range. Many of the students were experiencing difficulty in Language Arts, as indicated in their weak skills in reading and writing, but all participants were on the prescribed Language Arts curriculum as outlined by the Department of Education.

The classroom teacher as researcher conducted the study over a seven-week period.

#### Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected through a variety of sources: Semi-structured, open-ended interviews with the students, which were taped; informal interviews which were not taped; written student self-assessments in reading; classroom observations during reading activities, such as, DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) time and book selection; one parent questionnaire; informal interviews with previous teachers within the school; and student's records/data. Additionally, the teacher-researcher kept a reflective journal in which observations as well as opinions, personal feelings and reflections were recorded and bracketed. The reflective journal, which also included formal field notes, was a very important aspect in grounded research as the teacher-researcher, recorded opinions, personal feelings and reflections, daily. As Hutchinson (1988, p. 130) stated,

Since grounded research required interpersonal interaction, the researcher must observe his own behavior as well as the behavior of his subjects. He must become aware of his own preconceptions, values, and beliefs. Only by being aware of his own “mind-set” and “bracketing” his own values Can the researcher begin to search out and understand the world of others.

“Bracketing” refers to being aware of one’s personal values and preconceptions and transcending them during the research in an effort to see a situation with a new perspective. Bracketing is vital to field research.

Hutchinson goes on to state that “Keeping a daily journal in which personal feelings and reflections are recorded can help the researcher become aware of and bracket his own values (p. 130).”

Interviewing focused on both semi-structured and informal interviews. Informal interviews were conducted with the students on an on-going basis throughout the study. Two examples of when informal interviews were conducted were during book selection in the classroom and Learning Resource Center or immediately after DEAR time. Such informal interviewing in instances served to clarify the more structured interview and observations as well as to assist the teacher-researcher in observations through the eyes of the participant. Questions for these informal, non-structured interviews were guided by the data that had already been collected and analyzed. Questions assisted to clarify previously collected data, to obtain further data or as a confirmation of collected data. This informal interviewing was recorded as field notes and coded by the teacher-researcher.

Prior to commencing the semi-formal taped interviews, the teacher-researcher reminded each individual participant of the following: They had the option of refusing to answer any question or could stop at any time; their responses would be confidential; their responses would not be reflected or in any way associated with their June progress report and the taped interviews would be destroyed within two years.

One semi-structured, open-ended interview was conducted with each participant, individually, as an attempt to allow them to voice their perceptions of themselves as readers by focusing on their own personal experiences. An audiocassette recorder was used to tape the interviews. The machine was set up and ready to go prior to each interview. As the tape machine had a built-in microphone and to ensure audibility, participants were instructed as to the distance and direction in which to project their voices. The participants were reminded to speak clearly and slowly and to be honest in their responses. Interview questions, which were initially intended as a guide for the interview, ended up being the focus of the interview and was therefore used with the participants, (see Appendix A). In an attempt to make the interview less structured and more informal, the students were provided with the opportunity and encouraged throughout the taping to add additional comments or information relating to reading. Freedom was also provided to pose questions any time throughout the interview. These interview questions relate to the research question, in an attempt to have students focus on their perception of themselves as readers. Essential to successful interviewing is to ensure that the participant is comfortable. As the teacher was also the researcher conducting the study in her classroom, the participants were comfortable with both the interview process and the teacher as interviewer. Therefore, it was deemed unnecessary

to pose general questions at the onset as a means of relaxing the participants. The participants were provided with the option of a “trial run” prior to beginning the actual interview, however none of them availed of it. They were excited and anxious to “get on” with the interview.

A maximum of three participants were interviewed on a particular day, most convenient to the participant and depending on the length of each interview. As the interviews were conducted during the lunch hour, participants who normally went home for lunch had to make arrangements for eating in school. The interview process was conducted in a neutral place in the school for these participants, which was the Guidance Office. The interview times ranged from fourteen to twenty-three minutes. The taped interviews were transcribed verbatim by the teacher-researcher within twenty-four hours of being conducted. All seventeen participants were interviewed and all interviews were audible.

The students’ prior school records/data was analyzed, specifically that which related to reading. Students’ reading test scores and previous written self-assessments were examined and compared with data collected during the study. Additionally, there were on-going informal discussions with former teachers within the school. At times, such documents and discussions are necessary to assist in the interpretation of data gathered in interviews or field notes or as a crosscheck with other data. Hutchinson (1988, p. 138) reports from Glaser and Strauss (1967) that, “Such diverse ‘slices of data’ insure density and provide different perspectives for understanding social phenomena.”

One parent questionnaire, "My Child As A Reader," was completed. To encourage the participants to return this questionnaire, it was referred to as, "homework for Moms and/or Dads." All grade 4 students were given this reader questionnaire to be completed at home by the parents. The participants' questionnaires were added with the research data, while the remaining ones were placed in the student portfolios. All seventeen participants returned this "parent homework," which was completed and signed by the parent/s. The participants' questionnaires were important as a means of comparing the participants' perceptions of how their parents perceived them as readers.

Another methodology of data collection was classroom observation, which was conducted by the teacher-researcher, mainly during reading activities such as DEAR (Drop Everything and Read) time, book selection and other such instances when the students were required to read. These observations were recorded as field notes with every attempt to provide thick, rich description. These field notes were coded by the teacher-researcher as they were collected and were compared with other data. Additionally the teacher-researcher kept a reflective journal in which opinions, observations, personal feelings and reflections were recorded. These personal thoughts, feelings and beliefs were bracketed.

The data was analyzed inductively using the constant comparison analytic method. The constant comparative data analysis involved the researcher in jointly collecting, coding and analyzing data. As Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 45) stated, "An analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them in order to develop his theory as it emerges." The comparing and contrasting of data began from day one and continued to add credibility throughout the study.



Hutchinson (1988, p. 131) stated that, "Data are compared and contrasted again and again, thus providing a check on validity." The multiple data collection methods, known as triangulation of data, assisted with the reliability of the study as well as assisted with diminishing bias due to the vast array of data available to the teacher-researcher. Limited generalizability resulted due to the fact that random sampling was not used in the selection of the participants.

Data collection ceased when no additional information was revealed using the various methods of data collection. At this stage in the study, the data had become saturated.

#### Data Analysis

Tentative emergent themes were noted as the data was collected. A similar format was followed for all seventeen participants for the semi-formal taped interviews and any clarification or expansion in participant responses was possible in the subsequent informal interviews, written student self-assessments and in some instances in the observations and student records. Written notes were recorded during or after the collection of data and included as field notes, especially for the informal interviews. The teacher-researcher's thoughts, feelings and reflections were recorded daily in a reflective journal and bracketed.

The seventeen transcribed semi-formal interviews, informal interviews, written student self-assessments and field notes were analyzed and coded individually as they were collected. Similarity in student responses was noted both individually and

collectively across the data. Similar themes continued to emerge throughout the data collection.

As students' perceptions were the main focus of the study, the initial criteria used to determine 'statements of relevance' or importance to the participants was 'I' statements, both positive and negative. Some specific examples include: "I would say that reading is...", "I found the book...", "I like reading a lot...", "I get scared...", "I read harder books..." "I can read bigger words..." "I think reading is important..." "I read..." Although few, other such self-reflective statements like "my" and "me," were also viewed as being of equal importance. Specific examples being, "It [reading] makes me grow...", and "My favorite type of book...",

The initial themes that emerged early in the data collection continued to appear consistently throughout and are presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Emergent Themes

<p>Word recognition, word identification strategies, interest in reading, parents' perception, peers' perceptions, teacher's perception, self-perception, progressive reading, meaning of reading, praise, functional reading, reading attitude, book selection, preferred reading time, reading to learn, reading to get a job, reading to pass in school, reading to assist with road signs, reading to grow, reading speed, font size, chapter length, book length, arouse feelings (e.g., sad, happy, scared), read more or practice to improve, external factors for improving, learning to read (external factors), favorite books, reading for information and observation of reading levels &amp; skills among peers.</p>
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Data was gathered extensively throughout the specified timeframe for the study. Data collection ceased when repetition in themes and participant responses was evident and recurring. At this stage in the study, no new information was forthcoming. The

simultaneous analysis and collection of data was coded manually by the teacher-researcher throughout the study. From early in the study, similarity in the emergent themes became evident and continued throughout. All emergent themes were analyzed and coded individually and subsequently organized into similar themes in an attempt to identify categories regarding the participants' perceptions of themselves as readers and what, if any, factors influenced these perceptions.

The emergent themes in Table 1 were eventually collated into five main categories: A) Decoding, B) Perception, C) Reading Affect, D) Value of Reading and E) Physical Features of Print/Books. These five main categories were identified through the following steps during a more in-depth data analysis:

Step One:

A printed file was created, which contained all data individually labeled and organized according to the various data collection methods and the date of data collection. For example, all of the transcriptions from the semi-formal taped interview were kept together. Original copies of all data were kept and stored in a binder. Working copies were duplicated for the purpose of coding.

As the data was simultaneously collected, analyzed and coded, initial emergent themes based on the criteria of what the participant said or wrote about as being important to them had already been highlighted. The initial criteria used to determine the relevance of a statement to the participant was the use of self-reflective statements, "I," "me," and "my." The data was once again read through in its entirety and any additional apparent themes were highlighted. At this stage in the data analyses, these were tentative themes and were not considered thematic.

### Step Two:

In an attempt to more easily manage the data, the participant responses in the transcribed interviews and written self-assessments were cut from the original file and were collated in a second file. As the main questions in both the taped interview and written self-assessments were the same, the individual responses were collated under the question along with the identity of the participant. A participant's real name was utilized in the data to alleviate confusion in the coding. Microsoft Word, copy and paste was used to assist with the collation of these themes. Incoherent participant responses, such as, "Ah, ah, ah..." shrugs and incomplete responses were placed in a miscellaneous file along with the teacher-researcher's questions, probes, clarifying statements and comments of a personal nature (e.g., "That was one of my favorite books/authors too."). At this stage in the analysis, cross-referencing using page numbers was not deemed necessary as the participant's responses were marked using their own names and therefore, could easily be retrieved in the original transcribed interview documents or written self-assessments.

### Step Three:

To commence a more in-depth data analysis, the collated transcription of each semi-formal taped interview and each written self-assessment, along with the informal interviews and field notes were read completely once again. Tentative themes were hand recorded based on the main ideas within the participant responses. The criteria used for selecting these main ideas, many of which had been highlighted during the simultaneous collection and analysis of data, to a large degree stemmed from the questions themselves. A third file was created in which participants' exact statements, either written or spoken

were cut from the individual data and included with similar themes in an attempt to make the data more manageable. Cross-referencing of page numbers was used for these statements which were cut from the data. Statements related to word recognition (e.g., “Yeah, read more bigger words,” “What I like least about reading is big words,” “A good reader can read big words,” and “Stuck on big words.”), were placed together under a similar theme. Microsoft Word, copy and paste, was used once again to assist with collating these statements under similar themes until all statements had been placed under a theme.

“Max Think,” a computer data analysis program was used to assist with the initial analysis and coding of the transcribed taped interviews and subsequently the Microsoft Word copy and paste items. Repetitive statements were cut so that each theme was included only once. For example, the theme “more difficult words” was included only once but a tally was created next to these words and phrases/statements to indicate how many times they appeared. Semantically similar words, such as harder words or more difficult words were also combined under one theme.

These tentative themes which were reduced and collated under similar themes are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Similar Themes

<p>Word identification, word identification strategies, perception of self, perception of peers, others (e.g., teacher, peers, parents) perception of me, emotions aroused during reading, attitude towards reading, beliefs, improvement, importance of reading, font size, chapter length, book length.</p>
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#### Step Four:

These groups of similar themes were further analyzed and reduced to five main categories that reflect what the participants discussed throughout the study as being important to them in their reading experiences. A further re-reading of the themes was necessary, as they were viewed in the context of what was said or written by the participants and compared to the field notes and in some instances previous school records. The final five main categories, as displayed in Table 3 are: A) Decoding, B) Perception, C) Reading Affect, D) Value of Reading and E) Physical Characteristics of Print/Books.

Table 3: Main Categories

<b>Decoding</b>	<b>Perception</b>	<b>Reading Affect</b>	<b>Value of Reading</b>	<b>Physical Features of Print/Books</b>
- word identification - identification strategies	- of self - of peers - significant others	- emotions - attitudes - beliefs	- academic - functional - recreational	- font size - chapter length - book length

#### Role of the Researcher

As the researcher was the classroom teacher conducting the study in her own classroom, this might have influenced the research in a variety of ways. The researcher's personal beliefs about teaching reading in the classroom might have had some impact on

the study. These participants were in the researcher's classroom eight months prior to conducting the study and have been influenced, to a degree, by her teaching practices and beliefs in reading.

The researcher might have also influenced the study through her interpretation of the data. Phrases and statements she heard during the informal interviews and the meaning, which she attached to such conversations, might have influenced the study. The semi-formal interviews transcribed verbatim, the observations during reading and book selection and the written self-assessments were also highly influenced by the interpretation she placed on them and as a result, the themes and categories that subsequently emerged.

The interview questions that framed the semi-formal interview, as well as the re-phrasing, probing and personal comments throughout, may have also influenced the study. Questions on the written self-assessments were also devised by the researcher, and while they were more general, this may have somewhat limited the participants' responses.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The analysis and results are described in this chapter. A summary of the five major categories of: A) Decoding, B) Perception, C) Reading Affect, D) Value of Reading, and E) Physical Features of Print/Books are provided. Prior to reporting the analysis and results of the study, an overview of the data collection methodology is provided. Subsequently the results of each of these themes are presented and discussed in relation to the two research questions: 1. How do grade 4 students describe their perceptions of themselves as readers? 2. What factors, if any, in the children's view influence the perceptions they have of themselves as readers? The results are then related to the literature in this area.

Data collection was conducted by the teacher-researcher during the regular school day, either in the grade 4 classroom or in the Learning Resource Center and included observation, informal interviews, one semi-formal taped interview, students' written self-assessments in reading, parent questionnaire, and students' records and documents. Simultaneous collecting and coding of data was continuous throughout the course of the study and consisted of:

1. Observations – All 17 participants were observed a minimum of twice and only some of the 17 were observed up to six times. These informal observations were recorded as field notes and every attempt was made to



provide thick, rich description. The teacher-researcher's reflections, thoughts or ideas were bracketed.

2. Informal Interviews – Informal interviews were on-going throughout the study. One informal interview was hand recorded in conversational format during the interview for each of the first five participants and lasted from seven to nine minutes in duration. Some of the participants were interviewed as many as six times but it was felt that in order to allow for a more “natural-flow” in dialogue these informal interviews were conducted and later recorded as field notes.
3. One Semi-formal Taped Interview – All 17 participants were formally interviewed and taped in a one-on-one setting. A maximum of three interviews was conducted during the student's regular lunch period. The students were provided with the opportunity to eat lunch, either prior to or immediately following the interview. These semi-formal interviews were conducted in the Guidance Counselor's office away from all other school noise. Two or three participants accompanied the teacher-researcher each interview session but only one participant was present in the room and interviewed at a time. While one interview was being conducted, the other participants waited in an adjoining room with the door ajar as they ate their lunch. The taped interviews lasted 14 - 23 minutes and were recorded using a quality school cassette recorder. While the main focus of the interview stemmed from specific questions (see Appendix A), the students were encouraged and frequently reminded throughout the interview to ask questions

or to discuss any aspect of reading. The final question posed in each interview by the teacher-researcher was, "Is there anything else about reading that you would like to say or add?"

4. Written student self-assessments – Seven to ten pieces of written data were collected from each of the seventeen participants which included copies of the students' written self-assessments as it pertained to their perceptions of themselves as readers. The questions were specific but allowed for individual responses of the students' perceptions. One example being, "What is reading?" In addition to responding to these questions, the participants were encouraged to discuss or include any aspect of reading. They were told that these questions were a guide and that it was perfectly okay for them to add any comments or questions related to reading.
  5. Parent Questionnaire – The parents were provided with a brief questionnaire, about their child's reading, "My Child as a Reader." To ensure maximum response, the participants were told that this was "homework for Moms and Dads." All 17 questionnaires were returned, completed and signed by the parent/s.
  6. Records – Participants' previous records, documents and reports were viewed and recorded as field notes. Brief, informal discussions with former teachers within the school were held for some of the 17 participants for the purpose of clarification and confirmation of data, which was also recorded as field notes.
- The triangulation of data assisted with the validity of the study. The comparing

and cross-checking of information derived through interviews, observations, student written self-assessments, parent questionnaire, school records and discussions with former teachers assisted with the validation of the student's responses and the teacher-researcher's interpretation of such data.

As the constant comparative method of analysis was used, the analysis of data was ongoing throughout the study. Data collection began with informal observations of the participants during DEAR (Drop Everything And Read) and other assigned reading times within the grade 4 classroom or Learning Resource Center. As there was very little if any disruption among the students during such assigned reading times, the teacher-researcher availed of this opportunity to record in thick and rich details descriptions of the participants throughout the focused reading time. Observations at this stage focused on whether or not the reader appeared to be engaged in reading. Observations included how engaged the reader appeared to be with the reading material through close observation and recording of body movements and gestures. For example, movement and looking around the classroom at other students or the teacher and/or fumbling with objects in and around their desk indicated that the participant was not engaged in reading. For this study, the participants who were believed to be engaged in reading were those who had their eyes on the reading materials and showed signs of eye or head movement, turned pages at fairly regular intervals and appeared to be unaware of what was happening around them. At the end of the assigned reading time, these participants were able to share and discuss what they had read with their peers or teacher. In addition, upon completion of the novel or other reading material, they were able to choose and complete a Literature-based activity. Conversely, the participants who were looking around the

classroom, playing with items on their desk, staring off, book closed or upside down, were considered to be unfocused and not engaged in reading. Rapidly flicking or turning of pages was not considered reading but rather skimming and looking at pictures. While this is recognized as an important part of the reading process, it was not considered “reading” for the purpose of this study. The participants who appeared not to engage in reading were not able to discuss or give details of the reading material.

Interestingly, when the participants were questioned by the teacher-researcher as to how they knew who amongst their peers was actually reading during assigned reading times, they provided such explanations as “eyes on their books,” “turning pages,” “they’re into the book,” and “facial or verbal gestures, such as laughing or smiling.” Some of the participants’ exact responses included:

Wanda: She looks at it [book], at the pages, and I see her eyes moving.

Dale: Ahm, it’s because it’s like, like they’re really into their book, like..., they’re really interested, sometimes they laugh.

Chrissy: Like, they’re not looking off and around the classroom all the time, they’re just staring right into the book.

Jacks: Because she’s like always looking at the book and sometimes she mumbles the words and like when she’s done the page, she turns the page.

Kyra: Because they’re really paying attention to it and they, they do not take their eyes off of the book.

Laura: Because every DEAR time if I just look across at her, she got her face really deep into her book.

When Laura was questioned as to how she knew who was not reading, her response was, “They got their book closed and probably just fooling around with something. Ahh, not reading.”

The simultaneous collection and analysis of data continued throughout the study. Observations continued throughout the study as did the informal interviews and written self-assessments. The semi-formal taped interviews were conducted at the convenience of the students, as some of them had to make arrangements to eat lunch in school on that day. A maximum of three interviews was conducted on any one day.

### Analysis and Results

Analysis and results of the study are discussed in this section. As described in Chapter 3 throughout the analyses of the data, the themes, which emerged, were collated into five main categories.

The five main categories, A) Decoding, B) Perception, C) Reading Affect, D) Value of Reading and E) Physical Features of Print/Books are summarized and discussed in relation to the two research questions and are subsequently related back to the literature in this area. The research questions are “How do grade 4 students describe their perceptions of themselves as readers?” and “What, if any, factors in the children’s view influence the perceptions they have of themselves as readers?”

As the themes and the criteria used to identify the five main categories were discussed in more detail at the beginning of this chapter, only a brief overview is presented to the reader to assist with understanding. The category of “Decoding,” included statements and phrases that described the participants’ perception of reading in

relation to word identification and word identification strategies. The terms, decoding and word identification, are used interchangeably. The participants' perception of reading is that decoding is central to the reading process. The second category, "Perception," is composed of two themes and included statements and phrases related to the participants' perception of self and peers as readers and secondly their perception of how "significant others" view them as readers. Significant others being their peers, parent/s and teacher. The third category and one that has been labeled, by experts in the field, as being the most difficult to assess, "Reading Affect," included statements which expressed the participants' beliefs, emotions and attitude toward reading. "The Value of Reading," the fourth main category, included statements and phrases in which the participants expressed the importance of reading relevant to three main themes, "Academic," "Functional," and "Recreational." The fifth and final category, "Physical Features of Print/Books," included statements in which the participants referred to the physical features of print/books which encouraged or discouraged them in their reading selection and experiences. In this fifth and final category, the four main themes of "Font Size," "Chapter Length," "Book Length," and "Book Selection," resulted from what the participants' discussed as being important to them and assisted to make reading difficult or easy for them to the extent that reading was pursued or avoided.

#### A) Decoding

This first main category of "Decoding," consisted of thematic statements and phrases from the written self-assessments, interview transcripts and informal interviews. Phrases and statements were included and considered thematic if they made reference to

word identification and word identification strategies. Throughout this study it became evident that the participants viewed decoding as central to the reading process.

Regardless of the questions posed during the interviews or written self-assessments, many responses made direct reference to decoding. For example, Brian's response to the first taped interview question, "How do you feel about reading?" was:

Brian: Like some words are easy, some words not....,

This comment clearly indicated that for Brian reading meant knowing the words.

Similarly, Dale's response to the question, "How would you rate yourself as a reader?" indicated that she too perceived reading as knowing the words, the difficult words.

Dale: Ahm..., well..., I don't know, not to brag or anything, I just think that I'm probably a pretty good reader.

When asked to clarify what she meant by "A pretty good reader," she continued:

Dale: Ahm..., well, I can read like very difficult words and other things like that [Other more difficult words].

Miller and Yochum (1991) reported similar findings in their study of students' perceptions of themselves as readers and the strategies they used to solve reading problems, and the most frequently stated perception, was the ability to read words in 77% of the subjects. They continued, "Students with word recognition difficulties knew that they had difficulty reading words and had developed strategies to deal with their problem; however, they lacked sufficient knowledge about why their strategies were ineffective and when they should use another one (p. 465)."

Dave's response to the interview question, "How would you rate yourself as a reader?" was:

Dave: Ah, I have a little bit of trouble. Sometimes I get stuck on words and I don't know 'em [words].

Dave's response here was an accurate description of his ability to decode and an indication that he too perceived reading as being able to read the words. When questioned what he would or could do to help him with the word, his response was:

Dave: Spell it out.

What Dave was doing was breaking the word down by spelling the letters, which assisted with his decoding strategy. Dave was unable to explain what he would do if he did not decode the word using this strategy and when asked he shrugged. Coinciding with Miller & Yochum's (1991) findings, Dave was lacking in metacognitive knowledge for decoding; he lacked the knowledge about why this strategy of spelling patterns was not effective and that if he incorporated another strategy, it might work. Despite the fact that Dave had been taught different strategies, he did not understand why one strategy was not working and that another one might as indicative in his response to another question, "What makes reading interesting/boring for you?":

Dave: Ah..., ..., ..., sometimes when I gets stuck on words, it gets boring if I don't, if I can't sound 'em [words] out.

Observations of Dave during DEAR and other assigned reading times described him as moving his head across the page as he read and sliding his finger along on each word. When he came across a word that was difficult or unknown to him, his head would stop and his finger would stay on the problematic word. Prior school records also



indicated that word attack strategies were being taught. His father in responding on the parent questionnaire, "My Child As A Reader," stated that, "Dave needs to learn how to read without pointing."

Other examples of the themes word identification and word identification strategies where the students perceive reading as the ability to read words were expressed in the written student self-assessment, "Me As Reader." Verbatim statements from 10 of the 16 participants who responded to the phrase, "In reading, I am getting better at..." included:

James: knowing bigger and harder words.

Laura: pronouncing my words.

Bob: sounding out words.

Brian: big words because its hard to now [sic] it (The words).

Chrissy: ..., and sounding out words I don't know.

Jackie: new words, reads faster and chapter books.

Jacks: words and reading.

Jessica: reconising [sic] words.

Billy: the words when they are small [Font] with big words like mississippi [sic] and arithmetick [sic].

Of the remaining six who responded, one made reference to spelling, two to reading in general, one to comprehension and two to being able to read longer chapters.

To summarize, grade 4 students in this study perceived reading as the ability to decode words. All 17 participants responded to the question, "What is reading?" during

the semi-formal taped interview. Their responses highlight and reiterate that they view reading as decoding:

Dave: Ahm..., I look at the words, if I don't know the words I just spell it out.

Jacks: Reading is..., ..., ..., I don't know. I would say reading is English...and ..., ..., you focus on a page of words and, ..., ..., and you learn more words like if a French person came into our class and didn't know English, we'd have to teach him English.

L. W.: How would you teach him English?

Jacks: You'd make these cards and have words on 'em and ..., ..., you'd tell him and he'd try to say it.

Um..., ..., (Reading is) looking at a page of words and trying to figure out the word, if I do not know it. I won't be able, like, I won't need to figure it out, 'cause I already know.

Jessica: A whole bunch of words, wrote on paper, um..., .

Billy: I don't, it's sort of like, I really sometimes do not know, really do. Teach them. Teach them like teach them some of the words. Like give 'em a word, give them a word and break it down in two halves.

Monica: Um..., ..., ..., I would say that reading is a bunch of words, and you pronounce 'em out and you just say them and that's it.

The participants also responded to this question, "What is reading?" in a written self-assessment. In comparison to responding to the same question in the interview, the participants had more freedom of time to think about this question prior to responding in the written self-assessment, as they did not have the immediate presence of the teacher

waiting for a response. Written responses were similar and fairly consistent in comparison to their verbal responses. Regardless of data collection method, responses consisted of a focus on word recognition as being central to reading also, as indicated in the following written responses:

Wanda: Reading is when you pick up a book and look at the words in it.

Lori-Lee: When you have a book in front of you and you are looking at the words and reading them, that is what reading is.

Dale: Reading is seeing a bunch of words in a book and letting your mind know what the words are.

Jackie: I think reading is a book that you are able to pick up and be able to read. When you are a baby I don't think you would be able to read. But when you get bigger and go to school you would be able to read. When you read you look at words and read them but sometimes you might not know the words and get help from somebody so you would know them next time.

Two themes emerged in this category, "Decoding." Evident from both the verbal and written participant responses, their perceptions of reading was decoding or in their own language, "knowing the words," which was the first theme. Employing strategies to assist with decoding or to paraphrase what the participants most frequently stated, "sounding 'em [Words] out," was the second theme.

### B) Perception

This main category of "Perception," focused on two distinct themes; the first theme consisted of how the participants viewed themselves and their peers as readers and the second theme within "Perception," related to how the participants perceived "significant others" viewed them as readers. In this study, "significant others," included the people most active in the participant's daily lives for the majority of their reading experiences and specifically included peers, parents and their classroom teacher. This second theme, "Significant Others," equates to Henk & Melnick's (1995) third category, "Social Feedback," in their Reader Self-efficacy Model in which direct or indirect reaction about reading is provided from peers, teacher and parent/s. Saracho (1980) posited that self-concept was determined based on perceptions that are formed from the views of "significant others." Self-concept plays a major role in students encountering success in reading and therefore having successful reading experiences. These perceptions may be formed from reaction to the student's reading directly or indirectly indicating success, acceptance and worthiness or conversely unsuccessfulness, lack of acceptance or unworthiness.

Participants' written and verbal responses indicated that, overall the participants displayed a positive reader self-concept as they described themselves in general terms as "good readers." Valencia (1990, p. 338) referred to Reader Self Concept as one's evaluation of "Self as reader." In comparison to informal reading scores and diagnostic assessments completed by the teacher, the participants provided an accurate assessment of themselves in terms of whether or not their reading had improved and whether or not they experienced difficulty. Henk & Melnick (1995) referred to this comparing of one's

present reading performance with past performance as “Progress,” and was their first category in their Reader Self-Efficacy Model. Informal and diagnostic testing within the classroom, prior records and observations confirmed that the participant’s self-assessments of their reading ability were accurate. Dale’s response as to whether or not her reading had improved and her explanation as to how she knew it had improved is highlighted in her comment:

Dale: Ah, yes I think my reading has improved. Ahm..., I feel that it’s improved because at the beginning of the year I couldn’t read very dif., really difficult words, like, ..., ..., and now I can, like it’s just like really easy.

Field notes describing Dale throughout one observation at DEAR time included a description of her totally absorbed in her reading:

Sitting sideways in desk, book in left hand up at chin level, elbow on desk, eyes on book, turn page, haven’t moved, haven’t moved – same position, page turned, same sitting position, right hand moved – now under chin and book lowered, head still tilted to left, still reading, turned page, same position, not moved, turn page. Continued reading after bell, (Note: A pewter bell on the teacher’s desk was used to signal the end of DEAR). The same position was maintained and page turning continued at regular intervals throughout the 15 minutes of DEAR.

Several other observations of Dale’s assigned reading experiences included similar descriptive data. She was very focused on reading and engrossed in her novel to the point of being oblivious of the other students in the classroom. She did not make eye contact with either her peers or the teacher throughout DEAR. She was obviously very focused on her reading and such observations of Dale were consistent throughout the

study. Such intense reading would certainly provide a reasonable indication that her reading had improved as she stated it had in her self-evaluation. In addition, the fact that she was so engrossed in her reading is significant in that she was not experiencing difficulty.

While the participants were able to identify when they experienced difficulty with decoding, they were not always able to employ strategies to assist them. They lacked the metacognitive knowledge to assist them with their difficulty. As was revealed in the first main category, "Decoding", the participants' perceptions of themselves as readers in this mini theme, "perception of self," was once again highlighted in relation to word identification.

Linked with the first main category, "Decoding," the students' perceptions of themselves and their peers as readers in this second category, "Perception," also focused on word identification. Peer assessments were not as accurate when responding to the general question, "How do you feel about your peers' reading?" as most participants responded, "Pretty good." More accurate responses occurred, however, when this question was rephrased to specifically ask who they thought were good readers and whom they could identify as having difficulty with reading in their class. The participants did not hesitate when identifying peers in response to this rephrased question. Reasons cited as to how they identified those having difficulty versus those who were better readers, however, differed. Explanations for those who had difficulty reading related mostly to "word identification," "reading speed" and "reading levels," as expressed in the comments:

Jessica: Some of them can read better than others.

Michael: Robin, sometimes asks you for help reading. Stopping when he sees a long word.

James: Robin, 'cause he's a slow reader, 'cause when you ask him to read, he reads slow.

Laura: Ahh..., I'd say most of them are [Good readers]. But some people are reading, are reading probably back a level or something. Some people are, but most people are I'd say reading at a grade 4 level.

Laura was questioned as to how she knew some of her peers were reading back a level and was asked to explain exactly what she meant by, "back a level." She responded:

Laura: I can tell when someone is reading back a level when ahh..., they're often going to the teacher and asking for help or..., when they read out loud or something, they're reading, kinda reading slow and they're trying to pick out words. That's how I know.

Reference to reading levels of self and peers seems to indicate that there is awareness that reading is progressive. There is certainly an awareness among some of the participants that the reading level does get progressively more difficult as you move up through the grade levels as indicated in their responses.

Jacks: 'Cause in some books, in the higher level books, I couldn't read the words, then I went down to the lower level and I read them, then I went up to the higher level and 'den I could read the higher level books.

Chrissy: I think it [Peer's reading] is pretty good but I think they could improve.

L.W. How might they improve their reading?

Chrissy: Ah, just taking like the reading levels one step at a time. And then like

when they're like reading like at let's say like grade 4 level, and then they get like really good at that then they could start reading grade 5 and they get good at that, then they could start... .

According to Laura, Chrissy and Jacks, decoding, reading speed and reading levels led them to believe that they themselves or their peers were either functioning below or at grade level. Other participants held this perceptions as well.

In comparison to the reasons cited for those experiencing difficulty with reading, the most frequently provided justification, for which they thought was a "good reader," was in reference to the time spent reading. Many participants stated specifically, "reading a lot," in response to the question, "What makes you think this person is a good reader?"

Jacks: Chrissy, 'cause when she has nothing to do, like any work, when she's finished, she's reading.

Jessica: Because, they usually, because they usually read a lot.

When James was asked to name who he thought were "good readers," he named the top one or two readers in the class, excluding himself. Yet, when he was asked the initial question in reference to his peers' reading, he responded, "My peers in class, I think they're reading is really good." He also accurately identified without hesitation the reader in the class who he felt was having the most difficulty. Miller & Yochum (1991) reported that students provide accurate assessments of their peers.

Perceptions of how "Significant Others" viewed the participants as readers is the second main theme in this category. The three questions participants responded to were:

1. How do you think your peers feel about your reading or you as a reader? 2. How



do you think your parents feel about your reading? and 3. How do you think your teacher feels about your reading? In addition, all participants were asked up front to explain how they knew what these “significant others” thought. Those who either forgot or simply did not state how they knew were asked the question immediately after their comment or response.

The participants demonstrated varying levels of competence responding to the first question of how their peers viewed them as readers. Some participants demonstrated uncertainty as to how their peers felt about their reading and responded, “I wouldn’t be sure, ah, I’d have to ask ‘em.,” or “I don’t know.” Others demonstrated a lack of confidence as indicated by hunched shoulders and questioning facial gestures and either chose to respond, “I don’t know,” or not at all. The question was rephrased for these participants but not pursued for those who continued to demonstrate a level of discomfort. In contrast, some of the participants responded readily with the belief that their peers thought they were “good readers.” For these participants, the rationale provided was that they were often approached by their peers and asked to identify a word or to read something for them as indicated in the following:

Chrissy: Oh they think I read really good like when they don’t know how to spell a word, they come to me or if they don’t know what word to use they come to me.

Monica: Well I think they think that I am a little good because a lot of ‘em want me to read to them and stuff like that.

Despite the expression of confidence in their own reading, some participants demonstrated that they were more comfortable than others responding to this question as demonstrated by body gestures and facial expressions such as, hunched shoulders,

squirming in the chair or playing with their fingers. Participants who demonstrated discomfort with the initial question responded more readily to the question, "Whom do you know in your class that finds reading easy or difficult?"

Consistent with the first theme, the participants' immediate response indicated that they were accurately able to identify peers who they perceived as experiencing or not experiencing difficulty with reading. Here again, the rationale was decoding related, because he/she had trouble sounding out words or because he/she has to ask you for help with a lot of words.

Participant responses as to how the second "significant other," the parent/s felt about their reading, were also immediate and all were of a positive nature. The reasons stated as to how they knew that their parent/s thought they were a "good reader," included feedback and praise such as "good job," and gestures which included, "a pat on the back," "a hug" or "a smile."

Jessica: Proud. Because when I read them, because when I read them books and stuff they usually say, "Good job Jessica," and they usually give them [me] a big hug.

Jackie: I think my mom and dad think I'm a really good reader. Because every time I read my mom listens to me and she don't like interrupt me like when I'm reading even if I get a bad, like a word wrong or something.

Other participants displayed confidence and merely stated they knew that their parents thought they were "good readers."

Billy: My mom and dad know I am a pretty good reader.

Dale: "My mom and dad feel that I read very well. They're glad to see that I'm

reading a lot and ..., ..., she, my mom usually, she says, are you going to read before you go to bed and I say ..., like, duh, I always do!”

Evident in these responses is their confidence about how their parent/s feel about them as readers. Decoding was highlighted in this theme as well, in relation to how their parents felt about their reading, as evident in Jackie’s response above.

Parent questionnaires, “My Child as a Reader,” which was referred to as “homework for Moms and Dads,” in an attempt to get full participation, provided useful information. The data in this questionnaire was compared with how the participants perceived their parents viewed them as readers. Overall, the parents’ responses confirmed the participants’ perceptions. Dave’s perception of himself as a reader was,

“Ah, I have a little bit of trouble. Sometimes I get stuck on words and I don’t know ‘em [words]. Because sometimes he [dad] helps me read a lot.”

When compared with his father’s response in the parent questionnaire, ‘My Child as a Reader,’ Dave’s perception of himself as a reader was consistent with what his dad reported:

Dave is a bit slow on his reading. Sometimes he puts effort in guessing words. But most of the time he waits for someone to tell him the word. Dave can read a story. But after the story, Dave as [has] difficulty understanding what he just read.

Other parents’ responses were similar to what the participants’ had stated about their parents’ perceptions of them as readers.

Similar responses were provided for the third “significant other,” the teacher, as most, if not all participants expressed that they felt that their teacher perceived them to be

“good readers.” The reasons they identified were feedback in the form of praise “great job,” “super,” “way to go,” and gestures like “a smile,” “a nod,” and “a wink,” which was similar to how they said that they knew what their parents thought.

Jackie: GOOD! Because like when I’m reading you smile and laugh most of the time.

Billy: Ah, I think you think my reading is pretty good ‘cause you tell me.

Chrissy: Good, you tell me.

Response in the form of praise and feedback is extremely important to students and they are aware of it as indicated in the above comments. As Johns & VanLeirsburg (1994, p. 101) state,

As students interact with teachers and parents, responses help shape desired reading progress. Exchanges need to be accepting, caring and patient while students are learning the complexities of reading. Students become empowered as they grow in ability and exercise their beliefs about printed materials. Teachers and parents offer support and facilitate independence in growth when they respond to learners.

Students respond well to praise and encouragement. Heathington (1994) report that Wigfield and Asher (1984) discuss studies that show most successful teachers of low socioeconomic status children use praise and encouragement as motivators.

One additional reason that they provided for knowing how their teacher felt about them as a reader was the assigning of additional projects as voiced by Laura in the following comment:

Laura: I don’t know [how the teacher feels about me as a reader]. Pretty good I

guess. Because sometimes I'm given projects and that to do, some harder things than other classmates and I find that pretty easy actually. When she'll [teacher] call me up or, me and another person in our class that are doing really well and get us to do one certain thing that other classmates won't end up doing.

### C) Reading Affect

The third main category is "Reading Affect." As noted in the introduction to this Analysis chapter, this category included statements and phrases from the affective domain. The participants' expressed "beliefs," "attitudes," and "emotions" as they related to their reading experiences. While the affective domain is not easy to measure (Athey, 1985; Henk, 1993), it has great impact on the students' reading, especially that of motivation (Wentzel 1989, 1991, 1996) and attitude (Mathewson 1985; Mathewson 1994; McKenna, 1994). A negative attitude has the potential of leading to a lack of motivation, which in turn may lead to reading avoidance. Identification of students who have negative feelings or who lack motivation in reading is important so positive encouragement can be provided through interaction with peers and the teacher.

One participant expressed negative views about reading which contradicted his reading behavior as he appeared to enjoy reading in school and expressed in his taped interview that he found it easier to read this year.

Michael: It's all right. I don't like reading a lot. I gets tired when I reads..., ..., ..., My head. ..., ..., ..., when I reads, I gets right tired and drowsy.

Further questions led to the discovery that Michael was reading each night after he went to bed, which brought him into and past his usual sleeping time. Obviously, he was

tired and fighting sleep, which appears to have been the reason for his drowsiness and tiredness. Based on the more in-depth questioning that transpired, it was revealed that his negative views were not about reading as much as they were about the time he chose to read. The interview resulted in Michael changing his reading to an earlier time, which diminished his feelings of being tired and drowsy and resulted in a more positive attitude towards reading. This incident with Michael is one example, which supports what Yochum, & Miller (1990) advocated, that teachers can use interviews as well as other methods to help them to better understand their students' views of themselves as readers.

The phrases and sentences from participants in the first two categories of "Decoding" and "Perception," highlighted the fact that the majority of grade 4 students in this study perceived decoding to be central to the reading process. One participant, Dale, in addition to her stating that she was a "good reader" because she knew all the words, made reference to the emotion aroused in her during her reading experiences.

Dale: Ahm, ..., sometimes, I get scared, sometimes it's pretty sad, ..., ..., all sorts of feelings.

It is apparent from Dale's comment that she recognizes reading to be something beyond word recognition. Experiencing emotion seems to be a part of the reading process for Dale. Expressions of her emotional arousal during reading ties in with the fourth category, "Physiological States," in Henk & Melnick's (1992, 1993, 1995) Reader Self-Efficacy Model, which includes the internal feelings, the child experiences during reading. Dale expressed her inner feelings in relation to her reading experiences and was able to describe some specific feelings. While not as specific as Dale's comment, other participants also expressed their inner feelings about reading.

Wanda: It [Reading] makes me feel good.

Chad: Ahm..., I feel good about reading.

Jackie: Well, I feel happy when I read.

While these last three comments were of a more general nature, they express the participants' perception of their inner feelings either during or in relation to reading.

Also apparent in the data, was the positive attitude the participants displayed towards reading. Many expressed their positive feelings about reading in general terms.

Dale: Ahm., I like reading a lot. I enjoy reading at DEAR time and in my spare time.

Jackie: Well, I feel happy when I read.

Billy: I like reading a lot.

Further indication of their positive attitude towards books and reading was displayed in their expression of favorite authors and favorite books.

Wanda: Yes, my favorite author, well, I have two, R. L. Stein and Lynn Reid Banks.

Chrissy: Ah., ..., no not really [Favorite author]. I have a couple Roald Dahl and Charles Dickens and lots of them like that.

Laura: I like reading. Ahhh., Heidi, I like to read, I don't know, I like to read mystery books, mystery books and sometimes scary books like Goosebumps. They're my favorite books.

Apparent in these comments is the idea that these participants do have an interest in reading and an overall positive attitude towards reading. They have expressed selection preferences, both of authors and books. Apparent in their responses, the

participants are also beginning to focus on categories of books as indicated in their stated preference of mystery. While it is evident that taste and selection does not necessarily include quality literature, initially, the students have to be given the freedom to choose independently. The current philosophy in learning is that students be active participants in their learning, which includes in the assessment process. Teale (1983, p. 3) stated that,

There are two general reasons why attitude merits attention in the assessment of reading. In the first place, it is widely accepted that a positive attitude toward reading is important for achievement in reading. The second sense in which reading attitude is important relates not to achievement but to the characteristics of a reader.

It is the belief of other researchers (Paris & Newman, 1990; Pressley & Ghatala, 1990; Zimmerman, 1989) that learning is facilitated best by having students play an active role in which they acquire knowledge about their own learning.

In addition to their independent selections, exposure to quality literature in the classroom would assist to broaden their knowledge and provide exposure to additional authors and books. Actively participating in whole class assessments of various narratives and genres within the classroom would be one of the most effective means of empowering students to eventually and more effectively assess and select quality reading material, independently.

Essential to success in reading is to have a positive attitude. Many educators state that poor attitude along with lack of motivation are the main frustrations with students in the classroom today. Increasing emphasis has been placed on motivation in the classroom today. Miller & Meece (1997, p. 286) reported that O'Flavahan, et. al, stated that,



“Perhaps this is why, in a recent national poll, teachers ranked motivating students and creating an interest in reading as their first priority.” Miller and Meece continued, “Creating an enduring interest in reading; promoting a desire to read; and understanding how teachers, peers, and parents can enhance such motivation were rated as highly important by most of the survey’s respondents (p. 286).” McKenna & Kear’s Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, focused on attitude as it pertains to two main constructs, Academic and Recreational. Researchers such as Valencia (1990) posited that a positive attitude leads to reading being sought after whereas, a negative attitude leads to reading avoidance. Smith (1990) expressed a similar view.

One final indicator, in this study, of the positive attitude that the participants displayed towards reading was voiced around receiving books as presents on special occasions. Receiving books as presents for birthdays, Christmas or other special occasions was perceived positively for all but one participant who stated that he would rather have a gift or puzzle for his birthday than a book. Obviously, he did not consider a “book” to be a present. All other participants in this study stated that they would be “really happy,” and that they would “feel good,” “feel happy,” or “feel nice,” if they were given a book as a present for some special occasion such as birthday or Christmas.

Maintaining the positive attitude towards reading and beliefs at the grade 4 level, for participants in this study was not difficult. Overall, the participants displayed a positive attitude towards reading and they believed themselves to be “good readers,” who had improved and were able to continue improving.

“Belief,” is the third main theme that emerged throughout this larger category, “Reader Affect.” Even those participants who accurately recognized that they had

difficulty in reading, still believed that they were, “good readers,” and that they had improved and were able to continue to improve. From their comments, it was evident that they all believed that they had potential. Chapman & Turner (1995) referred to beliefs regarding ability and proficiency in reading tasks as perceptions of competence. Belief in oneself and one’s ability is also linked with positive experiences in reading, which heightens one’s motivation, self-efficacy and self-concept. As it pertains to reading, Henk & Melnick (1995) referred to this belief as “Reader Self-efficacy.” They defined reader self-efficacy in terms of a psychological construct to be a person’s judgement of his or her ability to perform an activity and the effect this perception has on the on-going and future conduct of the activity. Other experts in the field agree that Reader self-efficacy can either motivate or inhibit reading (Bandura, 1977 1982; Henk & Melnick, 1995; Schunk, 1982, 1983a, 1983b; & Zimmerman & Ringle, 1981).

In response to the question, “Do you feel your reading has improved this year? How? and/or Explain?,” it was apparent that the participants held the belief that their reading had improved. The most frequently stated reason was daily practice.

Chad: It [Reading] has improved by me reading every day and night.

In addition to their expressed belief that reading had or would improve by increased reading time, some of the participants attributed their improvement to factors, external of themselves, such as the books and the teacher, when asked how they improved their reading:

Wanda: Higher. Like read more difficult books.

L.W. Okay, read books at a higher level or read more difficult books. What, do you think, has helped you to be able to read more difficult books?

Wanda: By my teacher's help.

Jacks: Because I know how to read more than I did at the, in September.

L. W. What, do you think, has helped you to be able to read better?

Jacks: The books and you.

Jessica: Umm..., to have a teacher who teaches 'em how to read (Laughs).

Improvement, for the most part, was equated with knowing more words and being able to read longer and more difficult chapters and books. The overall reason they felt they had improved or how they stated that they would improve was practice through increased reading and reading on a more regular basis. Miller & Yochum (1991) reported similar findings in their study; practice was viewed as the main avenue through which their performances would improve.

#### D) Value of Reading

The fourth category, "Value of Reading," included statements and phrases which the participants made in relation to the importance they place on reading. Three main areas, "Academic," "Functional," and "Recreational," were areas emphasized by them. Two of these areas were similar to McKenna & Kear's (1990) main two constructs in their Elementary Reading Attitude Survey, which included "Academic Attitude" and "Recreational Attitude." In addition, the participants in this study placed great emphasis on reading for functional reasons.

The participants were asked two main questions, "Do you think reading is important?" and "What are some of the reasons people read?" All participants expressed

positive views that reading was important. Responses indicated that they viewed reading as being important for, academic, functional and recreational purposes.

The participants who viewed reading to be important for academic reasons, frequently stated the academic reasons were “to learn,” “to do good in school,” and “to pass grades/tests.”

Michael: It will help, it will help you pass grades, like grades 5 and 6.

Dave: Ah..., make them know more words.

Lorri-Lee: It helps me learn.

In reference to the response, “to learn,” when specifically asked what would be learned by reading, they provided such responses as, “to spell and write,” “to learn new words,” and “to find information.”

Kyra: Because you won’t learn as much and you won’t know how to spell some words.

Jessica: Because sometimes if you don’t know how to read, you won’t learn as much.

When further questioned what she would learn by reading she continued:

Jessica: Learning how to spell and write. And to compose sentences, like you say (laughs). To find out information. Like if they read a dictionary. To find information and for the enjoyment of reading.

Jessica’s comment makes reference to all three themes, “Academic,” “Functional” and “Recreational”. Evident in the above responses, and similar responses by other participants, is that reading involves understanding. While the students have referenced decoding as being their perception of reading, these comments, in addition to a few

others, is probably an indication that the participants are becoming more aware of reading for the purpose of comprehension. Studies have shown (Henk & Melnick, 1998; Miller & Yochum, 1991) that at this level, grade 4 students view reading primarily as the ability to decode which provides support for the participants' responses to the question, "What is reading?" where reading was viewed mainly as word identification. Decoding was mentioned more frequently in comparison to reading to learn in this category, "Value of Reading," as well as in others. In addition, some of the participants who referred to reading as an activity, in which one would learn, could not tell what it was that they would learn.

Lorri-Lee: It helps me learn.

L. W.: Reading helps you learn, what? Can you tell me?

Lorri-Lee: Shrug! (No response).

Many of the participants, who made reference to the importance of reading from a functional perspective, did so in reference to getting a job. Other references to the importance of reading included being able to read environmental print such as, street signs, television advertisements and food labels.

Jacks: To read the signs when you're driving on the highway, so you know what route to go.

James: 'Cause like you wouldn't be able to read labels on food and like if you're having cereal you'd probably put vinegar in it if you didn't know how to read.

Despite the fact that the participants discussed these reasons for reading, which include comprehension, they continued to rate themselves and their peers as readers mainly by "decoding." They viewed decoding as central to the reading process.

The final theme in this fourth category, “Value of Reading,” is “recreational reading.” McKenna and Kear (1990) used a recreational reading attitude construct in their “Elementary Reading Attitude Survey” to refer to the attitude students have towards reading for enjoyment. While the recreational aspect of reading was mentioned by the participants to varying degrees, those who did make reference to it stated that most people read because they “enjoy it,” “cause it’s fun,” “it is relaxing,” and “cause they feel like reading.” The fact that they discussed reading for the purpose of enjoyment either for themselves or in reference to why they perceive that people in general read, is an indication that recreational reading is important to them, enough so to discuss it.

To maintain students’ enthusiasm about reading, they require many opportunities to read strictly for enjoyment, otherwise the risk of becoming “turned off” may and will likely increase.

Most participants in the study stated that they enjoyed DEAR time in the classroom. When they were asked if they thought that it should continue next year and why, their overall unanimous positive responses affirmed that DEAR was valuable and that it should continue next year.

Brian: I think DEAR time is really fun, because then I get to select some kind of book that’s really interesting, like the book I got right now is called, *The Brailey* ah, school ahhm..., ahm...

L. W. : *The Baily City Kids*.

Brian: *The Baily City Kids*, ahm., *Vampire Trouble*. I read about um..., almost through the first chapter yesterday.

Chrissy: Yeah, ‘cause like it [DEAR time] like gives them another opportunity to

read.

James: I feel about DEAR time that it's good for your reading and it makes you read better. Yes I think that you should continue with DEAR time next year 'cause it's good for reading.

These comments seem to express that reading is viewed as an enjoyable activity in school and that it also has value beyond that of enjoyment.

#### E) Physical Features of Print/Books

The fifth and final category, "Physical Features of Print/Books," included participants' statements in which they made reference to "font size," "chapter length" and "book length." They viewed these three criteria as being very important to them in their reading. Mathewson (1976) reported in his study that print size and style affected the reader's interest. These three emergent themes were emphasized and referenced in relation to several aspects of reading. One area, being "the ease or difficulty in decoding." Other areas included, "rating of themselves as a reader," "improvement," "book selection," and lastly whether reading was considered "interesting or boring."

Obvious from the responses and observations, the grade 4 students in this study, view larger font as being easier to read and smaller font as more difficult to read as expressed in the taped interviews and written self-assessments.

Laura: The most difficult aspect of reading for me..., it would have to be reading thick books with small letters. I am no good at doing that.

Billy: The most difficult aspect of reading for me..., reading very small Printing [font]. In reading I am getting better at..., the words when they are small

[Font] with big words like m[M]ississippi and arithmetick [sic].

Bob: I think my reading has improved this year because I can read more chapter books and small words [Font]. I would like to improve reading small words [Font].

Chad: The most difficult part of reading is when there is small print and larger chapters. The area of reading I would like to improve is smaller print and longer chapters.

Both observations and informal interviews during book selection and sign-out confirmed these findings that the participants prefer larger font, shorter chapters and shorter length novels. It was observed throughout this study that when the participant's viewed books with smaller font, they were quickly placed back on the shelf in the classroom as well as in the Learning Resource Center. The classroom novel collection contained many books on a variety of levels as well and it was observed that the longer books and the ones that contained smaller print were very seldom if ever signed out.

Participants who were interested in these longer novels with the smaller print signed it out based on its front cover appeal, as noted in their response, "The cover looked interesting," when asked why they signed the book out. Lowery and Grafft (1968) also reported that the book cover affected the student's interest. A week later when the book was returned, it was openly admitted that they had not read it and in most instances had not even begun to.

While these more lengthy books that contained smaller print were appealing to the students they stated that they could not read the book because the chapters were too long and the words [Font] were too small. They admitted that they did not like small font and



that it would take them too long to read the book. Additionally, they reported that they found it too difficult to read as it “hurt their eyes” or it was “hard on their eyes.” In contrast to what they stated, they also expressed that the only way they were to become better at reading the smaller font was to practice. Seldom, if ever throughout the study, did they follow this advice.

Students have to be given opportunities to self-select and to choose books based on their perceived reading ability and interest. As Lysaker (1997, p. 273) reported in her study, “Self-selection of reading materials is thought to allow children control and responsibility in literacy learning, to enhance reading motivation, and to increase engagement in the reading process.” Guidance and monitoring is necessary so that the students challenge themselves in their book selection as well. Students have to be made aware that continual reading of the “easier books,” will not produce improvement rates and neither will the signing out of books that are too difficult or frustrating to the point of giving up and therefore not being read. On-going discussions and monitoring within the classroom is essential between the teacher and the student in order to assist the student in finding the “right book” for him or her. The “right book,” being one that will challenge but not frustrate or discourage the reader.

The participants’ perceived notion of the best way to improve was fairly consistent throughout the study. As Michael stated, “I think the best way to improve on my reading is to read even more longer books and more pages.”

In contradiction to what Michael stated, he continued to do the exact opposite of what he believed would improve his reading by signing out and reading the shorter books which contained larger font. This was indicative of the behavior displayed by the

majority of the participants during the observations and informal interviews throughout the study. It was noted that they continued to sign out books that contained larger font and shorter chapters or the novel itself was shorter.

Teacher monitoring, discussing and guiding students in the book selection process is important and should eventually lead to the students independently selecting books that would hopefully be challenging as well as enjoyable for them. The teacher must act as a facilitator of the learning process. Researchers have reported (Bandura, 1977, 1982; Bandura & Schunk 1981; Schunk 1984) that a learner's sense of efficacy increases if he/she is an active participant in their learning. The facilitation of learning, while keeping the teacher informed and aware of the students' perceptions, has a greater chance of creating independent learners if the learners are actually involved in the process.

In summary, as Yochum & Miller (1990, p. 163) stated,

By using multiple assessment measures such as observations, interviews, and instructional techniques, teachers can broaden classroom reading evaluations to include students' perception. In this way, teachers can gain a more complete understanding of their students, and students can gain a more complete understanding of themselves as readers and learners in the classroom.

#### Analysis of the Data, A Summary

In this section, "Analysis of the Data, A Summary," an analysis of the results will be presented in relation to the research questions.

The study focused on grade 4 students' perceptions of themselves as readers. Specifically the two research questions were: "How do grade 4 students describe their

perceptions of themselves as readers?" and "What factors, if any, in the children's view influence the perceptions they have of themselves as readers?"

Overall, this study seemed to infer that these grade 4 students perceived themselves as "good readers," who viewed decoding as central to the reading process and regular daily reading as the primary mode of improving. Their notion of a "good reader" was directly related to word identification as indicated in their numerous comments and responses. Valencia, Pearson, Peters and Wixson (1989) however, state that we can no longer define "good readers" as those who merely decode. They state that,

We no longer define good readers as those who are able to decode precisely all the words on the page but rather as those who can build meaning by integrating their own knowledge with information presented by an author. Good readers are not those who demonstrate mastery of a series of isolated skills, but those who can apply important skills flexibly for a variety of purposes in a variety of authentic reading situations. Good readers are not those who can read short pieces of text and answer literal comprehension questions, but those who can read longer, more complete authentic texts about a variety of topics and respond to them thoughtfully and critically. Finally, good readers are not those who simply read on demand in school, but those who have developed a disposition for reading and a commitment to its lifelong pursuit (p.58) .

Evident in the participants' comments and responses throughout the study, these participants viewed reading as decoding first and foremost. Few references were made to reading in relation to comprehension, except in a general sense, "to learn." When specific

questions were asked as to what they might learn through reading for example, many participants could not explain.

The participants expressed a positive attitude about reading in general and stated that reading was valuable. They expressed their preference for larger font and smaller chapters versus smaller font and longer chapters. These provide a summary of the factors, which influenced the perceptions they have of themselves as readers. The individual and thematic statements were collated under similar themes which were eventually reduced to five main categories: “Decoding,” “Perception,” “Reading Affect,” “Value of Reading” and “Physical Features of Print/Books.” These main categories and the themes within each category are what surfaced in this study as being the main factors, which influenced the student’s perception of themselves as readers.

Common through all of the categories was the emphasis placed on reading as decoding. The first category, “Decoding,” focused on word identification and word identification strategies. While the participants demonstrated an awareness of their difficulty with word identification, they lacked the knowledge about why and when a particular strategy was effective or ineffective. The main strategy that they referenced was “sounding out,” and from observations and diagnostic assessments within the classroom, these participants used mainly beginning and ending sounds when using this “sounding out” strategy. One participant, Monica, mentioned one other strategy as evident in her response:

Monica: I have a little bit of trouble on some words and stuff. I try to sound it out or if I can’t sound it out I skip it and come back to it.

When questioned why she would come back to it, she was unable to explain other than to say, "To see if I know the word." While Monica was attempting to use context or semantic clues to decode the word, evident from her comment was that she did not understand what she was attempting to do. When questioned, she was not able to explain what it was that she was attempting. The second category, "Perception," also emphasized decoding as it pertained to self and peers. In addition to rating themselves as readers according to their word identification ability, the main factor used to rate their peers was ability or lack of ability in decoding. In the third category, "Reading Affect," most participants expressed a positive attitude towards reading and a belief that they had improved. Once again however, their feelings and beliefs referenced their ability to decode. Responses to the question, "What do you find most interesting/boring in reading?" included comments relating to difficulty and/or ease with decoding. The category, "Value of Reading," referenced decoding, as they would learn new words by reading. When asked to explain, "learn new words," many of the participants were unable to and explicitly stated that they did not know or responded with a shrug. Those who responded did so in general terms without providing an explanation as to what they really meant and stated, "learn new words." The last category, "Physical Features of Print/Books" also made reference to decoding as the participants expressed finding larger font easier to read. They also expressed their preference for reading materials, which contained shorter chapters and shorter length books.

Emphasis on decoding at the various grade levels has long been a focus for researchers. Henk & Melnick (1998), in their study of upper elementary-aged children's perceptions about good readers, reported that researchers Johns & Ellis (1976) conducted

a study of students in grades one to eight and reported that, "Children were largely unaware that the purpose of reading was comprehension. Instead, children's responses to questions about the nature of reading indicated that they generally tend to associate the process with decoding (p. 58)." Despite the fact that it was almost thirty years ago, their findings support the results in my study, mainly that the participants are unaware that the purpose of reading is to obtain meaning but rather they associated the process with word identification.

More current research by Henk and Melnick (1998) provides support for the findings in my study as well. Specifically, that reading was related to decoding and that comprehension was very seldom mentioned by students in elementary. In their results they stated, "Interestingly, although the literacy instruction of fourth, fifth and sixth grade children should focus on reading to learn, the comprehension category was cited by only one third of the respondents (p. 66)." They continued,

In making "good reader" judgements, children most frequently referenced the public performance/fluency category grouping of reading (i.e. word recognition, word analysis, and reading rate). The three other major category groupings included selected teacher practices (Verbal praise and call upon patterns) as well as indicators of affect (Amount of reading, enjoyment, and recreational reading) and classroom achievement (Task/test performance and grades). Comprehension, studying/practice, providing or receiving assistance, reading group membership and effort represented remaining categories of note, although the comprehension aspect was mentioned by far fewer students than would be desirable at these grade levels (p.66) .

These three other major categories in Henk and Melnick's study (i.e., teacher practices, affect and achievement), were expressed to varying degrees by the participants in this study with the exception of "call upon patterns" in teacher practices, which was not mentioned at all.

While the participants in this study were able to identify their difficulties with decoding, they were not always able to effectively utilize strategies to assist them with their word identification difficulties. The most frequently mentioned decoding strategy was "sounding out." Very little mention was made in reference to reading for meaning and when it was, it was done in very general terms. These students who view reading as "reading all the words correctly," may focus on decoding and may not monitor for meaning (Yochum & Miller, 1990). In order to assist the child in understanding what he or she is doing, we must first understand the child's perception of the reading process (Johnston, 1986).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this qualitative study, 17 grade 4 students' perceptions of themselves as readers and the factors, which influenced these perceptions, were revealed as the students were observed and interviewed in their natural environment. Observations, written self-assessments and interviews conducted in reading and reading related activities throughout the course of the regular school day revealed that various factors influenced the perceptions they have of themselves as readers.

Through the two research questions, which framed the study, students' perceptions of themselves as readers and what, if any, factors influenced these perceptions, it was revealed by the participants that reading was viewed as decoding and that practice would improve their reading. Their view of this notion of reading was fairly consistent for all seventeen participants. It was obvious that some of the seventeen participants were beginning to view reading as more than decoding as articulated by them in their responses. Five main categories, which emerged were, A) Decoding, B) Perceptions, C) Value of Reading, D) Reading Affect, and E) Physical Features of Print/Books. Themes within each of these categories are what emerged as being the factors, which the participants stressed as influencing their perceptions of themselves as readers. As Henk & Melnick (1998, p. 63) stated, "As educators gain a greater understanding of the factors that children use to form reading ability appraisals, literacy contexts can be created that maximize the potential for children's learning."



### Implications for Educators

As discussed throughout the Literature Review chapter, research in the field has placed great emphasis on reader self-perceptions as a means of understanding the child's perceptions of him/herself in relation to the reading process. This has great implications for educators within the classroom. Understanding the student's perceptions enables the teacher to assist, guide and direct the students as he/she actively participates in his/her learning. Researchers in the field have emphasized the need for teachers to understand the students' perceptions of reading prior to being able to assist them. As Henk & Melnick (1995, p. 472) state, "It is not hard to imagine a direct link between readers' self-perceptions and their subsequent reading behavior, habits and attitudes." It is only when the teacher understands the students' perceptions, reading behaviors, habits and attitudes can the teacher create a classroom atmosphere and provide the support that is needed for the student to achieve his/her potential. Also, the teacher's method of assisting the child should be explained to the parents during parent-teacher conferences so that the parents are able to assist the child at home while maintaining some degree of consistency with the school. Parents need to understand the process and be able to work with the child in a more active and collaborative role at home as well, as opposed to the role of telling the child while he/she sits passively.

The new Language Arts curriculum prescribed by the Department of Education places great emphasis on the learner as an active participant in the learning process as they attempt to meet the "Learning Outcomes." To reiterate Johnston's (1986) belief, it is necessary to first understand the child's perception of the reading process before one can begin to assist the child. As facilitator of learning rather than the more traditional method

of, "direct teaching," it is necessary to understand the individual students and the perceptions they have of themselves in reading from both a personal and academic perspective. Portfolio assessment is included in the whole assessment process in Language Arts and educators must assume the role of facilitator in order to guide student learning so that they develop self-management skills as active participants in their learning. As Tierney & Clark (1998, p. 475) state,

Portfolios provide teachers a means of pursuing assessments tied to their classroom practices and help them to reshape their teaching and to better respond to their students' needs. Portfolios act as springboards, then, for teachers, students, and others to learn about themselves in relation to one another through goal setting, reflections on progress, and ongoing self-assessment and analysis.

Student self-assessment has become part of the overall assessment process in the classroom today. This places great demands on educators to act as facilitator of the learning as well as to inform and involve parents in this more holistic approach to learning. The teacher has to be aware of how the students view the reading process as well as the students' self-perceptions. Valencia (1990 p. 338) stated, "In addition to assessing across a range of texts and purposes, we need to consider other important dimensions of reading such as interest and motivation, voluntary reading, and metacognitive knowledge and strategies." She goes on to say, "Assessment must provide for active, collaborative reflection by both teacher and student (p. 338)." Yochum & Miller (1990) summarized ways in which teachers can broaden reading evaluations to include students' perceptions within the classroom environment and they consist of, observations, interviews and instructional techniques, all of which coincide with the data

collection methods used in this study. Collaboration between the teacher and the student is a must if educators are to create a classroom environment conducive to assisting the students to reach potential.

#### Limitations of the Study

Despite the fact that every attempt was made to remain objective, the teacher performed the dual role of teacher-researcher throughout the study and was the sole analyzer of the data, which may have eliminated total objectivity. The triangulation of data assisted with the objectivity of the study to a large degree. The teacher-researcher is not consciously aware of any personal bias anywhere in the study. In the dual role of teacher-researcher, in which this study was conducted, one hundred percent subjectivity cannot be guaranteed, therefore the results may contain a degree of personal bias.

The length of the semi-formal interviews varied for each participant, which may have impacted the participants' responses. While the participants were given free range when it came to time, the interviews ranged from approximately 14 minutes to 23 minutes. As the participants are individuals with individual differences, some may have required more time to collect their thoughts prior to answering therefore, a second interview would allow the tentative emergent themes in this first interview to be more fully explored.

Another limitation of the study is that not all of the seventeen participants completed all ten written self-assessments due to absenteeism or other such reasons. Since this data was used to validate information obtained through the interviews and observations it may be possible then that their responses in the interviews are not fully

indicative of their perceptions of themselves as readers. As Patton (1990, p. 331) states, “Triangulating data sources, means comparing and cross-checking consistency of information derived at different times and by different means within qualitative methods.” He continued, “It means validating information obtained through interviews by checking program documents and other written evidence that can corroborate what interview respondents report.”

The final limitation of this study is its generalizability, which is not possible due to the fact that random sampling was not used for the selection of participants.

#### Recommendation for Future Research

Suggestions for further research, which evolved from this study, are as follows:

1. It would be interesting to do a follow-up study of these same 17 participants when they are in grade 5 and/or grade 6, to see if they have the same perceptions of themselves as readers that they expressed in this study. It would certainly be interesting to see if students perceive reading as decoding or if they were more focused on reading for meaning and reading as interaction with text at this higher grade level.

2. A study conducted in a school with students of a higher socio-economic status using grade 4 students would be beneficial for comparative results. The greater majority of students in an affluent school might have had more exposure to both expressive and receptive language prior to entering school. Therefore, it would be interesting to discover what their perceptions of themselves as readers are and what, if any, factors influence these perceptions.

3. An interview with these same participants or a similar interview with other grade 4 students and have them expand on their perception of “learning,” as it relates to reading.

4. A study designed solely to determine students’ perceptions of themselves as they attempt to interact with print and the strategies they employ and why they utilize these strategies. It would be most beneficial from a classroom teacher’s perspective to view how the students select and utilize the various strategies and why.

5. An examination of the factors which contribute to the students’ self-assessment practices within the classroom. This would be most beneficial for teachers in helping them to structure reading and assessment practices within the classroom.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. How do you feel about reading?
2. What do you think makes you feel this way?
3. How do you feel about DEAR (Drop Everything and Read)?
4. What do you think makes you feel this way?
5. How do you feel when you get a book as a gift, say for your birthday?
6. How do you feel about reading to relax?
7. How would you rate yourself as a reader?
8. Do you feel that your reading ability has improved this year? How do you feel that you have improved in your reading?
9. How do you think your peers feel about your reading? Your parents? Your teacher?
10. How do you feel about your peers' reading?
11. Who in your class enjoys reading? Why do you think so?
12. Do you think reading is important?
13. What are some of the reasons people read?
14. What would be your most favorite time to read?
15. What are some interesting things that you have read?
16. What makes reading interesting, boring for you?
17. What is reading? How would you define reading?
18. Is there anything about reading that you do not like? Explain?

## APPENDIX B

LETTER FOR PERMISSION: SCHOOL DISTRICT

64 Stamps Lane  
St. John's, NF  
A1B 3 H6  
1999 05 17

Mr. Brian Shortall  
Superintendent  
Avalon East School Board  
Suite 601, Atlantic Place  
215 Water Street  
St. John's, NF  
A1C 6C9

Dear Mr. Shortall:

I am a graduate student from Memorial University of Newfoundland, actively engaged in completing my masters program in Education, Teaching and Learning, Language Arts, with an emphasis on reading. I have completed all of the necessary course work and have conducted research and completed my thesis proposal. I am ready to commence my thesis and am requesting your consent to conduct a qualitative study in my Grade IV classroom at Bishop Abraham Elementary from April to June 1999. The attached thesis proposal will explain in detail what I am proposing to study. Briefly, I want to explore and describe **students' perceptions of themselves as readers**. Consent will be obtained from the parent and participant and I understand that anytime throughout the study the participants may refuse to participate and may refuse to answer any question if they so desire. The study will be conducted in the regular classroom with the exception of an interview, which will be conducted in a neutral place in the school at a scheduled time outside of the regular class time. The Grade IV Language Arts Curriculum will not experience any disruption as a result of this study and I will continue to teach the curriculum that is set out by the Department of Education. It is my hope that the results of this study will provide me with important information that will assist in my future teaching endeavors with the students.

If you wish to discuss my proposal in greater detail, I am available to do so at your convenience or you may speak to my Thesis supervisor, Dr. Marc Glassman at 737-7627. If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with the study, please contact Dr. Bruce Sheppard, Associate Dean of Graduate Programmes & Research Development at Memorial University, 737 8484. You may reach me at 579-9071 (work), 726-3819 (home), e-mail [ldwalter@stemnet.nf.ca](mailto:ldwalter@stemnet.nf.ca) or at the above address. Thank you for your anticipated cooperation.

Sincerely,

Lorna Walters

## APPENDIX C

LETTER FOR PERMISSION: SCHOOL

64 Stamps Lane  
St. John's, NF  
A1B 3 H6  
1999 05 17

Mrs. J. Skinner, Principal  
Bishop Abraham Elementary  
196 Pennywell Road  
St. John's, NF

Dear Mrs. Skinner:

I am a graduate student from Memorial University of Newfoundland, actively engaged in completing my masters program in Education, Teaching and Learning, Language Arts, with an emphasis on reading. I have completed all of the necessary course work as well as a review of the literature for my thesis proposal. I am requesting your consent to conduct a qualitative study in my Grade IV classroom at Bishop Abraham Elementary from May to June 1999. The attached thesis proposal will explain in detail what I am proposing to study. Briefly, I want to explore and describe **students' perceptions of themselves as readers**. The study will be conducted in the regular classroom with the exception of an interview, which will be conducted in a neutral place in the school at a scheduled time outside of the regular class time. Consent will be obtained from the parent and participant and I understand that anytime throughout the study the participants may refuse to participate or may refuse to answer any question if they so desire. The Grade IV Language Arts Curriculum will not experience any disruption as a result of this study and I will continue to teach the curriculum that is set out by the Department of Education. It is my hope that the results of this study will provide me with important information that will assist in my future teaching endeavors with the students.

If you wish to discuss my proposal in greater detail, I am available to do so at your convenience or you may speak to my Thesis supervisor, Dr. Marc Glassman at 737-7627. If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with the study, please contact Dr. Bruce Sheppard, Associate Dean of Graduate Programmes & Research Development at Memorial University, 737 8484.



Thank you for your anticipated cooperation.

Sincerely,

Lorna Walters

**APPENDIX D****LETTER FOR PERMISSION: PARENT/GUARDIAN**

1999 05 17

Dear Parent or Guardian:

I am a graduate student at Memorial University of Newfoundland, currently working on my thesis. I will be interviewing children at Bishop Abraham to explore and describe students' perceptions of themselves as readers. I am requesting your permission for your child to take part in this study.

Your child's participation will consist of one interview, which will be taped on an audiocassette recorder. A list of questions that deal with their feelings about themselves, as readers will be asked and your child will respond. Your child will be asked to participate and it will be made very clear that he/she may stop at any time he/she wishes to do so and return to the regular classroom. Your child may refuse to answer any question if he/she so desires. The interview will be conducted in the Learning Resource Center between 12:25 and 12:55 and will last for approximately 15 - 30 minutes. In addition, your child will be observed in the regular classroom during reading activities and I will make notes. Children usually enjoy participating in such activities.

All information gathered in this study is strictly confidential and at no time will individuals be identified. Your child has chosen a pseudonym, which identifies your child by a different name for the purpose of this study. Taped interviews will be destroyed within a year of completion of the study. I am interested in what perception students have of themselves in relation to reading. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw your child at any time. Your child may refuse to participate and may refuse to answer any question if they so desire. This study has received the approval of the Faculty of Education's Ethics Review Committee. The results of my research will be made available to you upon request.

If you are in agreement with having your child participate in this study please sign below and return one copy to me. The other copy is for you. If you have any questions or concerns please contact me at the school, 579-9071 or my Thesis Supervisor, Dr. Marc Glassman at 737-7627. If at any time you wish to speak with a resource person not associated with the study, please contact Dr. Bruce Sheppard, Associate Dean of Graduate Programmes & Research Development at Memorial University, 737 8484.

Please return this signed consent form to me by \_\_\_\_\_.

Yours sincerely,

Lorna Walters  
Grade IV Teacher

## APPENDIX D

### PARENT CONSENT FORM

I \_\_\_\_\_ (parent/guardian) hereby give permission for my child to take part in a study on students' perceptions of themselves as readers, conducted by L. Walters, Grade IV Teacher. I understand that participation is voluntary and that my child and/or I can withdraw permission at any time. All information is strictly confidential and no individual will be identified. Taped interviews will be destroyed within a year after the completion of the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

\_\_\_\_\_  
PARENT'S/GUARDIAN'S SIGNATURE

### PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I \_\_\_\_\_ have agreed to participate in a study on students' perceptions of themselves as readers, conducted by my Grade IV teacher, Ms. L. Walters. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate and may refuse to answer questions at any time throughout the study. All information is strictly confidential and I will not be identified. I have agreed to have a pseudonym (a fictitious name) instead of my own name for this study. The name that I have chosen is

\_\_\_\_\_  
PSEUDONYM

I understand that taped interviews will be destroyed within a year after the completion of the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
DATE

\_\_\_\_\_  
PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE



