A Case Study Exploring the Reading Engagement of Middle Grades English Learners

Maria Selena Protacio
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, MI
selena.protacio@wmich.edu

Abstract
This study investigates the reading engagement of four middle school English learners in their English or English as a Second Language classroom. Students with high levels of reading engagement are those who (a) are motivated to read, (b) use strategies when reading, (c) use reading as a way to construct meaning from texts, and (d) participate in social interactions around reading (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). This study focuses on all four aspects of reading engagement and explores whether there are any additional components that should be considered with English learners’ reading engagement. Data included in this case study research include semi-structured interviews, field notes from classroom observations, comprehension assessments, reading activity inventories, and student artifacts. Findings from this case study research indicate that all four components are essential to consider with English learners’ reading engagement. Results of this study also reveal that English learners’ identities are an essential component of their reading engagement.

Keywords: reading engagement, English learners, reading motivation

In recent years, researchers have given more attention to reading engagement, particularly at the secondary level (e.g., Guthrie, Wigfield, & Klauda, 2012; O’Brien & Dillon, 2008) because of studies that have shown a relationship between reading engagement and reading achievement (Guthrie, McRae, & Klauda, 2007; Morgan & Fuchs, 2007; Mucherah & Yoder, 2008). Many reading engagement studies have focused primarily on native-English-speaking students. There is little research which has focused specifically on English learners’ (ELs) reading engagement, particularly for middle grades ELs.

The middle grades are a critical and complex transition period for ELs (Bishop, Allen-Malley, & Brinegar, 2007; Brinegar, 2010; Walqui et al., 2010), and transitioning to middle school can be even more tenuous for ELs (Virtue, 2007, 2009). Middle school is also the time when students generally exhibit a decline in reading motivation and reading engagement (Loera, Rueda, & Nakamoto, 2011; McKenna, Conradi,
Lawrence, Jang, & Meyer, 2012). Even as students progress through the middle grades, reading motivation continues to decline with each grade level (e.g., Kelley & Decker, 2009; Unrau & Schlackman, 2006). It is also in the middle grades when the achievement gap in reading widens between ELs and their native-English-speaking peers (Fry, 2007). Results of the 2014 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) showed a statistically significant difference in the reading scores of ELs compared to their native-English-speaking peers at both the fourth and eighth grades. Given the performance of middle level ELs in reading on national assessments and the relationship between reading engagement and achievement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000), there is a need for researchers to closely examine the potential of reading engagement to improve middle level ELs’ academic performance.

Students with high levels of reading engagement are those who (a) are motivated to read, (b) use strategies when reading, (c) use reading as a way to construct meaning from texts, and (d) participate in social interactions around reading (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). Although cultivating engaged readers is a goal for middle grades teachers, it is not an instantaneous process for ELs (or any student for that matter) to become engaged. It must also be noted that reading engagement is not dichotomous with readers being either engaged or disengaged. Rather, reading engagement can be conceptualized as a continuum with different levels at each of the reading engagement components that shift based on various reading situations.

In a previous study, I explored elementary ELs’ reading motivation and found that ELs who were motivated readers wanted to read English texts because of social motivation, instrumental motivation, and high levels of perceived competence (Protacio, 2012). Given the research that has shown reading motivation (an integral part of reading engagement) steeply declines when students transition to the middle grades (e.g., McKenna et al., 2012), I wanted to know more about how ELs’ reading engagement might change in a middle level setting.

Despite the promise of improving reading engagement as a way to facilitate ELs’ reading achievement, there have only been a few studies conducted on this topic (Arzubiaga, Rueda, & Monzo, 2002; Ivey & Broaddus, 2007; Loera et al., 2011; Robinson, 2010; Sturtivant & Kim, 2010). In addition, none of these studies investigated all four components of reading engagement. To fill this gap, I conducted a qualitative study to provide a more complete picture of ELs’ reading engagement. I chose a case study design to describe and interpret four middle level ELs’ reading engagement in their English as a Second Language (ESL) or English classroom to better understand the literacy development of young adolescent ELs. Specifically, I focused on the following research questions:

1. What motivates or discourages middle level ELs to read in English?
2. What strategic knowledge do middle level ELs draw upon when reading?
3. What are the ways in which middle level ELs construct meaning from texts?
4. In what kinds of social interactions do middle level ELs engage around texts?
5. What other factors must be considered in relation to ELs’ reading engagement?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is grounded in the expectancy-value framework and sociocultural theory. Because an integral part of reading engagement involves reading motivation, I also incorporated aspects of motivational theory to better understand reading engagement. While several motivational theories are pertinent to this study, I focused on the expectancy-value framework. Further, by using sociocultural theory in this study, I acknowledged the roles that ELs’ social and cultural backgrounds play in influencing their engagement with reading. Sociocultural theory allowed me to emphasize the broader picture of the social and cultural contexts, and how they play a part in cultivating reading engagement. In this section, I briefly discuss each theory and explain how each theory informs the study.

The Expectancy-Value Model

The motivational framework that is most applicable to the study is the expectancy-value model (Eccles et al., 1983). Eccles and her colleagues posited that for motivation to occur, individuals must believe they will succeed at a task and also value the activity. Both expectancy for success and value of the activity or task must be present; the interaction of these two components influences individuals’ performance, effort, and persistence at the task they face (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). From the perspective of an expectancy-value framework, ELs must think of themselves as capable readers to become motivated, and they must understand the value of reading or outcomes of reading. If ELs
consider themselves poor readers or place low value on reading, their reading motivation levels will be negatively influenced.

Researchers have documented that expectancy and values regarding reading decline from elementary to middle grades (Guthrie, Alao, & Rinehart, 1997; Henk, Marinak, & Melnick, 2012; Unrau & Schlackman, 2006). Guthrie and colleagues (1997) offered an explanation for the declining levels of reading motivation of students at the middle level: “As children get older, their competence beliefs and expectancies for success tend to become more sensitive to success and failure experiences. . . . Less successful students lose their intrinsic motivations for reading due to their eroding sense of competence” (p. 440). In other words, when students have repeatedly experienced failure or encountered numerous challenges with reading or tasks associated with reading, it becomes increasingly more difficult to address students’ self-concept as readers. Because ELs may have experienced challenges in acquiring English proficiency and learning the grade-level content, focusing on their self-concept and the value they place on reading becomes even more important. Thus, in this study, I closely examined focal students’ self-concept and instrumental motivation (or the value they place on reading) because this likely influences their motivation and, correspondingly, their reading engagement.

**Sociocultural Theory**

While the expectancy-value framework focuses on factors at the individual level, sociocultural theory provides a broader picture. Those who use sociocultural theory as a lens examine the individual’s interaction within the larger sociocultural context (Alvermann, 2005; Rueda, MacGillivray, Monzo, & Arzubiaga, 2001). In other words, one’s literacy development is influenced by his or her social context and cultural backgrounds (e.g., Au, 1997; Gee, 1996; Heath, 1983). Au (1997) provided an application of sociocultural theory by describing how one’s perception of reading is influenced by social and contextual factors.

A sociocultural perspective begins with the assumption that reading, like other higher mental functions, is essentially social in nature. . . . Learning to read cannot logically be separated from the particular milieu in which it takes place. When children learn to read, or fail to learn to read, they do so in a particular social, cultural, and historical environment. (p. 184)

Hence, in this study, I could not examine ELs’ reading engagement without considering the social contexts and cultural backgrounds of these students. ELs’ perceptions of what it means to be a reader might differ based on their social contexts and cultural background. For instance, Sarroub (2005) found that for young adolescent Muslim females, reading the Qur’an was the most valued literacy practice. Young women who were able to recite from the Qur’an provided honor to their families, regardless of their academic achievements in school.

Similar to Rueda and colleagues (2001), I would argue that ELs’ reading engagement cannot be truly understood without viewing it through a sociocultural lens. As such, I considered ELs’ backgrounds as I analyzed the data in order to describe what their reading engagement entailed. In sum, the multifaceted nature of reading engagement necessitates the use of multiple theories. While motivational theory is important in examining ELs’ individual beliefs and values with regard to reading, the idea that reading is a social and cultural activity must also be recognized.

**Methods**

**Research Design**

A case study design was well suited for this study’s research questions as it allows for multiple qualitative data collection techniques (e.g., Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) to address the multifaceted components of reading engagement. As Yin (1989) argued, the unique strength of a case study over other research methods is “its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations” (p. 20). Yin (2005) also indicated that a case study design should be used to get a close and in-depth understanding of a situation because it allows researchers to observe and collect data in a natural setting. Therefore, by using a case study design, I was in a better position to describe ELs’ reading engagement by observing them on multiple occasions within their classroom context, engaging them in in-depth interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2008) and informal conversations, and collecting student artifacts that spoke to their reading engagement.

**School Setting**

This study was conducted at Ford Middle School (FMS) (all names used in this article are pseudonyms), a seventh- and eighth-grade suburban school in a Midwestern state. During the time of the study, the school had a diverse student population composed of 522 students who represented 27 countries and numerous native languages. Forty-three percent of students qualified for free or reduced lunch.
In terms of resources for ELs, there were two ESL classes taught by the ESL teacher, Mrs. Blake. She did not have any paraprofessionals as support personnel. Instead, Mrs. Blake relied on community volunteers and pre-service teachers from the local university for additional help. One class period was specifically for seventh-grade ELs, and it served as a resource room where ELs could obtain support for their academics. For newcomers, this was also the class period in which they received intensive English instruction. Another class period was for both seventh and eighth graders. The initial part of the class was devoted to academic vocabulary instruction. Students who were advanced in their English proficiency and who were enrolled in a mainstream English class then proceeded to the library and used the rest of the period for academic support, while Mrs. Blake taught the formal ESL class for those who had not yet reached English proficiency.

**Participants**
In total, I had four student participants: Two of them were highly engaged readers, and two were less engaged readers based on observations and teacher feedback (see Table 1). Two teachers of the ELs also participated as they allowed me to observe their classes and interview them.

**Jonathan.** Jonathan was a seventh grader who was originally from China. When Jonathan first came to the U.S. in 2008, he knew very little English although he was already literate in Chinese. I first met Jonathan in spring 2010 when he was in fifth grade, and he agreed to participate in my study on ELs’ reading motivation. At this time, Jonathan’s oral English speaking abilities were well developed, but he spoke with a thick Chinese accent. In the beginning of 2012, when I encountered Jonathan as a seventh grader, there was a noticeable change in his speech as he spoke like a native English speaker. His English teacher, Ms. Costa, admitted she thought Jonathan had been born and raised in the U.S., and she did not know he was a former EL until I contacted her about my research project.

**Nabila.** The next focal student was Nabila, an eighth grader whose family was originally from Afghanistan. Her family left Afghanistan because of the conflict and moved to Pakistan, where Nabila and her youngest brother were born. Although Nabila’s family lived in Pakistan, they lived in an Afghan community, and thus, Nabila and her siblings were exposed to Afghan culture and norms. When Nabila was eight years old, she and her family came to the U.S., except for her father, who remained in Pakistan. Nabila mentioned the primary reason that her family relocated to the U.S. was so she and her five siblings could have a better education. The importance of a good education was instilled in Nabila. She was very concerned with how well she did in school, and she took full advantage of the help offered in her ESL classroom. When I first met Nabila in spring 2010, she was a sixth grader, and she was very timid during our first interview. In the second interview, she opened up more and was very enthusiastic about explaining the different factors which affected her reading motivation. When I started this research project two years later, I saw that Nabila had morphed into a young woman. She also continued to wear the traditional hijab (head scarf) that Muslim women wear, sporting a different one every day that complemented her outfit. As a middle level student, Nabila was often very quiet in whole group discussions, but she was very outgoing and talkative in small group settings.

**Oliver.** Oliver was an eighth grader who was originally from the Democratic Republic of Congo. He came to the U.S. with his single mother and older brother when he was only five years old, and he remembered little of his time in Congo. Oliver was still fluent in his native language, French, which was the language spoken at home. Oliver was fluent in

| Name   | Grade | Years in U.S. | Native country | Native language | Receiving ESL services |
|--------|-------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| Farshad| 7     | 6             | Afghanistan    | Farsi           | Yes                    |
| Jonathan| 7    | 4             | China          | Mandarin        | No                     |
| Nabila | 8     | 6             | Afghanistan    | Dari            | Yes                    |
| Oliver | 8     | 8             | Congo          | French          | Yes                    |
oral English, but even though he started school in the U.S., Oliver was still in ESL class for academic support. In terms of classroom participation, Oliver was fairly quiet. He often did not participate in class discussions, and he offered answers only when the teacher called on him. In these instances, he had a tendency to mumble and often was asked to speak louder and more clearly. As I got to know Oliver throughout the data collection process, I found that his passion was science and anything related specifically to physics. Unfortunately, his teachers did not know of this interest.

Farshad. The final focal student was Farshad, who was a seventh grader originally from Afghanistan. When he was very young, his family moved to Russia, where he attended a Russian school for first and second grade, but he did not learn any English. His family, except for his father, moved to the U.S. when Farshad was nine years old. Thus, his initial exposure to the English language was when he entered the third grade in a U.S. public school. Farshad recalled that he did not have any problems learning English and learned how to read in English fairly quickly. Out of the four focal students, Farshad was the only one who was placed exclusively in the ESL class. Even though Nabila and Oliver were in the sixth-period ESL class, they attended it for academic vocabulary lessons and homework support. They were in a separate grade-level mainstream English class. Farshad was adamant that he should not be in ESL class and did not know why he was placed there. According to the ESL teacher, Farshad was placed in the ESL class because he needed additional support on his academic English skills despite his oral English fluency.

Mrs. Blake. Mrs. Blake had been an ESL teacher for 12 years, but she had been teaching for more than 20 years. At the time of this study, Mrs. Blake served as the ESL teacher for both the district’s middle school and high school. She taught ESL classes at the high school in the morning, and at noon she drove to FMS where she taught three periods of ESL classes. Although she taught at both schools, Mrs. Blake acknowledged that FMS was her “home base,” and this was the school with which she was more involved. Mrs. Blake ensured that her classroom at FMS celebrated the diverse backgrounds of her students. Her classroom door had the words welcome and hello in multiple languages. On one of the walls, she displayed a world map with pictures of her current ESL students. Strings connected each EL’s picture to his/her native country on the map. In addition, Mrs. Blake actively recruited community volunteers to assist in her classroom so that her students could get individualized support.

Ms. Costa. Ms. Costa was Jonathan’s seventh-grade English teacher, and this was the first school year she had her own classroom. She had a part-time contract and only taught two classes of seventh-grade English. Prior to teaching at FMS, Ms. Costa’s experiences were all at the high school level. One of Ms. Costa’s strengths was building relationships with her students. Students were allowed to sign up to have lunch with her in the classroom. She also allowed independent work time, and during these times she was always available to answer questions. During these classroom events, there was typically a line of students who wanted to obtain her feedback, which indicated that students felt comfortable with her.

Data Collection
I used various sources in this study to gather data on each of the four components, which allowed me to offer a quaternary view of reading engagement.

Classroom observations. I observed the focal students two to four times a week in their ESL/English classes. In Mrs. Blake’s classroom, I was a participant observer. From early on, Mrs. Blake encouraged my participation in small group interactions with her students. Thus, I was able to work closely with Nabila and Farshad, and these interactions provided me valuable opportunities to learn how they approached and completed various academic tasks. Oliver, meanwhile, kindly declined any help that I offered to him during sixth period. As a result, I noted I had very little evidence of Oliver’s participation in Mrs. Blake’s classroom. I was able to observe Oliver in his mainstream English classroom on two occasions where I was a full observer. In all of these classroom observations, I focused primarily on focal students’ contributions during discussions around texts, their non-verbal cues during classroom or small group discussions about classroom texts, and their behavior during independent work time when they were responding to or producing texts.

While observing Jonathan in Ms. Costa’s English classroom, I was primarily an observer. As such, I wrote detailed, descriptive field notes about classroom events (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). In these field notes, I focused specifically on Jonathan’s participation in and reaction to classroom discussions and tasks.

Semi-structured interviews. I conducted four semi-structured interviews with each focal student (Fontana
& Frey, 2008). In the initial interview, I established rapport with the focal students, and I also asked them questions specific to each of the reading engagement components. For each succeeding interview, I reviewed the prior interview and included follow-up questions meant to clarify ideas or probe for more information. I also based interview questions on observations. Doing so ensured the participants had an opportunity to voice their thinking rather than relying merely on my interpretations of my classroom observations (Eder & Fingerson, 2002).

Comprehension assessments. I administered four Qualitative Reading Inventory-5 (QRI-5; Leslie & Caldwell, 2011) passages to each focal student. I asked each focal student to read two narrative and two expository passages to obtain information on their ability to construct meaning from texts. They were asked to think aloud while reading these passages, which provided data on their comprehension strategy use.

Student artifacts. I collected student artifacts (e.g., reading logs, English papers) to provide additional data on focal students’ ability to construct meaning from texts. In addition, these artifacts confirmed or refuted what focal students indicated in their interviews about what they were learning about or completing in their classes.

Data Analysis
Data analysis was concurrent with data collection. During the data collection period, I reviewed the data I had already collected to help focus my attention on emerging patterns that I was observing or that continued to surface in interviews. I reviewed interviews immediately, taking note of ideas that I should revisit in succeeding interviews. I also reviewed field notes prior to each interview so I could identify classroom events that I wanted to discuss during each semi-structured interview.

A combination of provisional coding and open coding was applied to the field notes and to the interview and think-aloud transcripts. I used a list of provisional codes derived from a literature review of ELs’ reading engagement. I also used initial coding to make new codes for ideas that I observed in the field or that were raised in interviews but not included in the list of provisional codes. Examples of initial codes included compliance and book characteristics for motivation, visualizing and evaluating for strategic knowledge, and isolation and book recommendations for social interactions. Since there were no provisional codes for constructing meaning from texts, all codes related to this component were done through initial coding. Examples of initial codes for this category include difficulties in understanding, mythology, and learning about disabilities.

I developed an Excel codebook to keep track of the codes, which offered several advantages. First, it helped me look quantitatively at the prominent codes in the data corpus, thereby making it easier to see patterns and themes based on the frequency of codes. Second, it allowed me to see and ponder if there were codes that should be merged, deleted, added, or refined. Last, I could sort the codebook in different ways, which allowed me to examine different patterns within the various categories.

I wrote analytic memos throughout the data analysis process, which enabled me to relate the data to theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Writing these analytical memos also allowed me to distance myself from the data itself and instead reflect on the themes that I was noticing through the data collection process. For example, I wrote memos about the influence of the Muslim religion on Nabila’s reading engagement. Finally, when I selected themes on which to focus for each focal student, I utilized triangulation to ensure these themes were supported by multiple sources of data. Stake (2008) described triangulation as “repetitious data gathering and critical review of what is being said” (p. 34). According to Stake, each important finding should have at least three confirmations or assurances that interpretations are supported by data gathered. Hence, I used multiple data sources (e.g., interviews, field notes, student artifacts) to support the findings of each case.

Findings
In this study, I explored the reading engagement of four middle level ELs in the context of his or her English or ESL classroom to determine how they engaged or disengaged with reading in school. I also investigated focal students’ out-of-school reading engagement through interviews and student artifacts, such as reading logs. In this section, I summarize the results for each reading engagement component and follow it with a discussion to provide a cohesive portrait of students’ reading engagement. Finally, I propose a fifth component which should be considered in connection to ELs’ reading engagement: identity.

Motivation
Students’ motivations to read texts were multifaceted (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000) as focal students were
motivated to read for very different reasons. There were, however, a few commonalities across the focal students. Jonathan, Nabila, and Oliver were intrinsically motivated to read texts that fulfilled their various personal interests. Jonathan and Farshad appreciated adventure books, while Nabila enjoyed multicultural literature as well as teen romantic fiction. Oliver was the only focal student who valued and read informational texts for pleasure. Jonathan, in particular, loved to read series, and within the data collection period, he started the 39 Clues series. He shared, “I read the fifth book in one day, the whole book, ‘cause I was so interested in it. I just finished another book yesterday and I’m trying to find the seventh book, but it’s not in the library yet.” In this interview excerpt, Jonathan provided evidence of his intrinsic motivation to read. He shared that he was able to finish an entire book, which was 156 pages long, in one day because of his high interest in the topic. Jonathan’s desire to read more shows that topics of texts and personal choice are significant in enhancing reading motivation (Flowerday, Schraw, & Stevens, 2004; Guthrie & Klauda, 2012; O’Brien & Dillon, 2008).

In contrast, Farshad was the least motivated to read out of the four focal students. He stated that “reading was just a waste of time,” but he was unable to articulate the reasons for his low reading motivation. One reason may have been that Farshad did not realize the value of reading as he viewed reading as solely a school-based activity. In an interview, I asked Farshad why he did not like to read, and he said, “Because I am never going to use it in my career.” Farshad shared that he wanted to move to California to become an actor after high school. Then, I asked, “Well, how do you think the actors know what they are going to say? They have to read a script to know their lines.” Farshad was quiet and did not reply, but he started to participate more in his ESL class after this exchange. Nevertheless, Farshad was the focal student who did not read in his free time. The only time I saw Farshad reading was on Fridays during the school’s Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) time.

In general, all the focal students were unmotivated to read academic texts such as textbooks. Nabila and Oliver said academic texts were uninteresting and boring to read. Jonathan was the focal student who had the most neutral attitude about academic reading. Rather than being intrinsically motivated to read required sections of his textbooks, he seemed to be motivated to read out of compliance. In other words, he was reading his textbooks because of an “external goal or requirement” (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997, p. 422). He read the textbook requirements because he knew doing so would be necessary to reap the rewards of high grades. He repeatedly mentioned that he must read textbooks so that he would earn a better grade in his classes: “Those books I don’t have specific interest in it. I’m just reading it for [completion] of schoolwork and just reading for a grade. I don’t love it, neither do I hate it. I’m just reading it.” This statement highlights his neutral attitude about reading for school. He realized it was something he must do if he wanted to do well in school. Jonathan’s case confirms Guthrie, Wigfield, and Klauda’s (2012) assertion that even high-achieving students find textbooks dry and boring. Meanwhile, Nabila, who was also consistently on the honor roll, was highly unmotivated to read the textbooks assigned in her content-area classes.

It’s just, it [the textbook] doesn’t make it sound exciting or fun or something. It doesn’t have anything. It’s just a list of things. It doesn’t really make your mind feel into it. They need to start, I don’t know, they can’t make social studies or science fun, I know that for sure.

Yet, Nabila was also the focal student who was most intrinsically motivated to read books especially when given the opportunity to pursue her own reading interests in her spare time. For example, during Reading Month, Nabila was one of the top three students in her ESL class who spent the most time reading based on the reading logs that students submitted. Nabila’s reading log entries indicated that she found much pleasure in the hours she spent reading. While the Reading Month initiative can be considered a form of extrinsic motivation because there was external recognition and pressure to read, Nabila went above and beyond the expectations for Reading Month. In some ways, Reading Month helped prompt Nabila to engage in even more pleasure reading because it gave her an additional reason to read for pleasure, and it also offered the promise of recognition.

**Strategic Knowledge**

Results of this study showed that students with higher reading engagement (i.e., Jonathan and Nabila) used a wide range of comprehension strategies, while those students with lower levels of reading engagement (i.e., Farshad and Oliver) demonstrated the use of fewer strategies.

**Highly engaged readers.** Jonathan and Nabila not only exhibited the use of a variety of comprehension
strategies through the think-aloud component of the QRI assessment, but they also demonstrated the use of strategies in their leisure and academic reading. They rarely used strategies such as paraphrasing and rather employed more complex strategies when reading, such as making inferences and evaluating.

During the think-aloud portion of the QRI comprehension assessments, Jonathan’s think-aloud statements were brief, yet he used a wide range of comprehension strategies. There were 41 separate instances of comprehension strategy use throughout the four comprehension passages. Specifically, he made inferences, made connections, and made emotional connections to the text. It is also important to note Jonathan’s use of higher order comprehension skills such as synthesizing and evaluating, though he did not use these skills as frequently.

Two of the passages that Jonathan decided to read for the QRI assessments were centered on immigration. After reading a paragraph about the assimilation process that many immigrants went through, Jonathan commented in his think-aloud, “Looks like lots of people like me, trying to be American and the hardest part was learning, writing, [and] reading English.” On a basic level, his statement indicates that he was making a text-to-self connection, relating the experiences of those he was reading about to his own immigration experience. His statement was also telling in that he said he was “trying to be American.” This is a theme that was consistent across his think-aloud statements for these two immigration passages and through interviews.

Nabila used numerous comprehension strategies when she read academic texts and leisure texts, although the specific strategies she used varied greatly depending on her purpose for reading. Specifically, in the QRI comprehension assessments, Nabila was able to exhibit 78 instances of strategy use and 10 comprehension strategies. The high frequency of strategy use was partly due to Nabila’s extensive responses during the think-aloud portions.

As an example, Nabila used comprehension strategies such as monitoring and clarifying when she read a passage entitled, “Malcolm X,” for which she had limited background knowledge. The passage was mainly about Malcolm X’s trials and how he trained himself to become literate while in prison. During the think-aloud portion, Nabila showed that she understood the text and the events that were discussed. At the end of the passage, Nabila commented, “But that doesn’t really tell me who he was.” This statement showed that Nabila was thinking beyond what she was reading. At the end of the assessment, Nabila recognized there was a hole in her background knowledge prior to reading the passage. Even though she understood the information she read, Nabila acknowledged the text did not provide her with a complete understanding about Malcolm X, and as evidence of her intrinsic motivation (e.g., curiosity), she continued to ask questions.

When reading leisure texts, Nabila often evaluated the actions of characters in the novels she read for pleasure. When she read the book Bitter Melon, Nabila wrote the following reaction in her reading log: “Frances needs to stand on her own feet because her mother always tells her what to do.” Nabila’s statement implied that she disapproved of the character’s lack of ability to take more control of her life. Aside from being evaluative, Nabila’s comments also illustrated the strong emotional connections that she made with characters about whom she read. These were examples of moments when Nabila was transacting with the texts she was reading (Rosenblatt, 1994). As Rosenblatt (1969) explained, when transacting with the text, the reader is paying attention to the “images, feelings, attitudes, associations that the words evoke in him [or her]” (p. 34).

**Less engaged ELs.** When students exhibited lower reading engagement levels, strategic knowledge was not as evident. Results of the QRI word list indicated that Level 6 passages should be administered for Farshad and Oliver, which was below grade level for both students.

Out of the four QRI think-alouds with Farshad, I was able to document 22 instances of strategy use. Out of the 22 instances, 21 of them consisted of Farshad paraphrasing what he was reading. The only other strategy he used was one instance of clarifying. In addition, there were 14 instances wherein Farshad was not even able to paraphrase what he was reading. In these cases, he would glance quickly at the passage and read verbatim what was in the text. It seemed he had the most difficulty out of all the focal students in completing a think-aloud even though I modeled how to conduct a think-aloud the same way for all focal students.

Farshad also did not exhibit and integrate much background knowledge with the QRI assessments. I spent a great deal of time working with the seventh grade ELs, and thus I knew the topics discussed in Farshad’s social studies class, among them Ancient Egypt.
Therefore, I expected Farshad would possess background knowledge for the QRI passage, “Building Pyramids.” However, when I asked the concept questions from the QRI, which are meant to ascertain the familiarity the reader has with topic of the passage, Farshad was unable to provide answers. For instance, when asked, “What is a pharaoh?” Farshad replied, “I forgot all this.” The next question was, “What is a mummy?” Farshad answered, “They mummy the body.” These examples showed that despite Ancient Egypt civilization being discussed in Farshad’s social studies class, he was unable to recall and retain information from this unit, which implied that he did not really internalize the information.

Oliver’s strategic knowledge presented an interesting case. On one hand, he was unable to clearly articulate the strategies he used as a reader. When asked what comprehension strategies he used, he said he did not know what comprehension strategies were, despite admitting that his English teacher discussed these in class. On the other hand, Oliver exhibited a wide range of comprehension strategy use during the think-aloud component of the QRI assessments. It is important to note that he did score frustration level on the comprehension portion of the expository texts, even when given the opportunity to look back at one of the passages.

For the think-aloud portions, Oliver had 29 instances of strategy use, and he used nine different comprehension strategies. The most common strategy he used was questioning, which he typically used when reading the expository texts that dealt with topics such as clouds and precipitation, and temperature and humidity. Next, he used paraphrasing mostly with the narrative passages. There were nine instances in which Oliver provided evidence that he was distracted and not really giving his full attention to the task at hand. For example, during his think-aloud when reading a passage about Lois Lowry, Oliver admitted, “I’m just really tired. I can’t really think of anything right now.”

Oliver said one of the strategies he used when he read for pleasure was rereading, especially when he was unable to understand the information in a science text. As an example, Oliver said, “The science books I read, it has information that is based on information in the past so I just go back.” Another strategy he admitted to using when reading science texts was clarifying: “If I don’t understand something I just go up and search it up.” Since acquiring Internet access at home, he had been exploring websites to find more information about the science texts, especially when he needed clarification on ideas he encountered in his science books. When asked about the trustworthiness of the websites he explored, Oliver explained,

> Usually when I read [a science book], it tells a brief description about it (the topic) so I just reread it like four times. If I don’t understand it and I go to the website and if it tells me a completely different thing about it, it’s not reliable.

Based on the preceding statement, Oliver was able to use his prior knowledge on a topic to evaluate the trustworthiness of a website. The fact that Oliver even evaluated Internet resources is important to note because researchers have found that compared to less successful learners, more successful learners were more likely to evaluate the credibility of an Internet source (Goldman, Braasch, Wiley, Graesser, & Brodowinska, 2012).

The information presented provides both positive and negative aspects of Oliver’s strategic knowledge. It is troubling that Oliver, an eighth-grade student, scored at frustration level on the comprehension section of Level 6 passages. Data obtained from the think-aloud portions of the comprehension assessments and from interviews showed that Oliver did, in fact, use numerous comprehension strategies, but he did not consciously realize that he was able to use different comprehension strategies to make sense of texts.

**Constructing Meaning from Texts**

Based on interview data, QRI assessments, and student artifacts, students who were engaged readers had consistently high levels of comprehension of both academic and leisure texts. Jonathan and Nabila were both very verbose when they shared information from interesting texts they had just read for pleasure, while Oliver and Farshad must be prodded to share ideas they learned from what they were reading.

Jonathan was the focal student who was most intent on acquiring knowledge through reading. Overall, he realized that reading was used for learning. He recognized that reading could be enjoyable, and he consistently engaged in leisure reading, but he also understood that through reading he could continue to learn. He stated, “I just wanna read as much as I can and learn as much as I can ’cause I have lots to learn.” Jonathan shared a substantial amount of information from reading texts in his English classes. For example, Jonathan provided an extensive response about what he learned from a unit focused
on Greek mythology, demonstrating his thorough understanding of the myths covered in English class.

Although Nabila must be prodded to explain what she learned from reading texts in her content-area classes, she was very enthusiastic to discuss ideas from pleasure reading. Artifacts from both students showed they were able to construct meaning from texts and use the knowledge they gained from reading to fulfill their academic obligations. For instance, Nabila’s English paper on the multiple meanings of the word “peace” demonstrated that she was able to synthesize information from multiple sources to write a comprehensive paper. Although Nabila exhibited low motivation to read academic texts, she was able to comprehend these texts.

In contrast, Farshad was unable to articulate his understanding from reading, even with below-grade-level texts. When asked what he learned from reading, Farshad did not offer much information on what he learned. When probed, he often would simply shrug and not elaborate on any ideas. These findings suggest that Farshad struggled with comprehension and constructing meaning from the texts that he read. It is plausible that Farshad’s low level of comprehension contributed to his low reading motivation level.

Oliver, because of his interest in science texts, realized that reading was a way to acquire information. He said, “Reading is only for one thing, to get information inside you. Learn information without another person telling you. So I think that’s what reading [is] for.” When Oliver told me he was interested in science, it seemed to contradict all of my classroom observations. Admittedly, I was skeptical during the earlier parts of the data collection process since his behavior in class showed he was disengaged in school, such as when I caught him sleeping in his English class. As the study progressed, however, I heard all of these explanations that Oliver provided about interesting facts and ideas that he had learned through reading. In our final interview, Oliver expanded on what he had learned about inflationary theory from a *Newsweek* magazine article he read:

Oliver: First, it talks about the inflammatory [inflationary] theory of how the universe is actually made by something called a cosmic field. I don’t really believe in this, but it’s like if too much of it is put into one place of space, it would explode and create a big bang. A lot of those has been happening and the effect of the particles is caused by this other one called string theory, which is based on strings vibrating, creating other bunch of particles, like particles that create our known particles that we know now like protons, neutrons, and stuff like that. So when the big bang is created, those strings started vibrating and then creating photons, gluons, and stuff like that and that mixes up with others and creates electrons and everything. . . . It also talks about gluons.

Selena: What are those?
Oliver: You know how a nucleus is created, right? And then the protons, neutrons are ties to each other. They’re not like normally gonna come to each other unless a gluon is there to attract them to each other.

This interview excerpt is remarkable because even though it had been approximately a month since he had read the article, Oliver was able to articulate this information immediately. Also, he was able to explain these concepts in concrete ways, such as the explanation of a gluon. It was encouraging to hear all the facts that Oliver had learned through reading. More important, he was passionate and motivated when relating these ideas in our interviews. In contrast, Oliver was barely able to provide any details of what he learned in his middle school classes, especially his English class. Oliver’s lack of interest in his English class affected his construction of meaning with the texts he encountered.

**Social Interactions**

The focal students’ participation in social interactions and the quality of their participation varied greatly from student to student. The majority of the students in Mrs. Blake’s ESL class were Muslim, and when all the students were together, there was very little interaction between students of different genders because this is not permitted according to Muslim customs (Sarroub, 2005; Zine, 2001). Mrs. Blake respected this custom and generally allowed the female students to interact with one another and the males to interact with other males. As such, Nabila mostly engaged in social interactions in Mrs. Blake’s class with her fellow Muslim female friends. In this study, I found that only Nabila participated in positive social interactions with her peers. Engaging in discussions with her friend, Aina, even influenced her reading motivation. She wanted to read the books her friends recommended so they could engage in more discussions about texts. I often would hear them in the library discussing books they had read. Nabila also mentioned that she and her friends talked about books over social media.
The three other focal students did not participate in these types of social interactions. Jonathan and Farshad both participated in social interactions about texts, although their purposes for doing so were not ideal. Jonathan participated in social interactions in which he could assume the role of the more knowledgeable student who was able to provide answers to his classmates. Although his English teacher, Ms. Costa, modeled for Jonathan positive social interactions regarding texts, he was not able to assume a coaching stance when working with his peers. Instead, he resorted to providing answers to his peers. Farshad, meanwhile, participated in social interactions to obtain answers from others. Generally, he did not see social interactions as a venue for co-constructed knowledge, but rather as an avenue for him to obtain support or outright answers to fulfill his academic obligations.

Meanwhile, Oliver rarely participated in social interactions. Although he was a voracious reader of informational texts, he did not share his insights and acquired knowledge with others. After he had shared all the information with me about inflamatory theory, I asked him with whom he shared these ideas. He said “no one” because he felt that “no one would care about what he was reading.” For Oliver, reading was a solitary activity.

**Identity Matters with ELs’ Reading Engagement**

Identity is essentially one’s answer to the question, “Who am I?” (Eccles, 2009; McCaslin, 2009). Researchers have focused on identity as a way to understand how immigrant students have negotiated their ethnic identity in school contexts in which they are minorities (Kanno, 2003; Saito, 2002), but none of these studies has focused specifically on how ELs’ identity has influenced reading engagement. Kaplan and Flum (2009) recognized that considering identity is essential to examining student engagement. This was certainly apparent in the experiences of the focal students as their identities as ELs are closely related to their reading engagement. This was most evident in Nabila’s case.

In the larger sociocultural context of her school setting, Nabila was struggling to make sense of her social relationships while simultaneously trying to adhere to the customs and norms of her Muslim religion. Nabila’s identity struggle impacted the social interactions about reading in which she participated. As a sixth-grader, Nabila had mentioned that she could start a conversation with anyone about reading. In contrast, as an eighth-grader, Nabila had only a limited circle of people with whom she shared her passion for reading. Furthermore, although Nabila had considered her sisters to be her reading role models when she was in elementary school, their contrasting beliefs about assimilating affected the social relationship they now had about reading. This stemmed from Nabila rejecting the pressure from her sisters to conform and become more Westernized.

When I asked Nabila to reflect at the end of the school year about her middle-grades experience, her primary focus was on her social standing. She recalled that students who she thought were her friends ignored her and treated her as if she was a “loser” or outsider. Nabila implied that her adherence to religious norms may have affected other students’ perceptions of her. While Nabila tried to put forth a dismissive façade regarding her social standing, I could sense that she wanted to be more accepted by her mainstream peers. Nevertheless, Nabila did not conform to the pressure to become more Westernized and instead stayed grounded in her Muslim identity. Her close friends were fellow Muslim girls who were all in the ESL class. Though they came from different countries, their adherence to their Muslim faith and desire to do well academically were common denominators within their social circle.

There were moments, however, when Nabila’s attitude about her social status seemed to fluctuate. During these times, she was concerned with other students’ perceptions of her and her religious and cultural background. One afternoon, with Mrs. Blake’s prompting, Nabila and her friend Sanaa took off their hijab in the ESL classroom and showed me their beautiful long hair. I noticed that both Nabila and Sanaa looked very different when their hair was down compared to when they had on their hijabs. Mrs. Blake and I complimented both girls on their hair. Nabila then quietly commented, “I wish they [other students] could see me like this.” While I did not address it with Nabila at the time, her statement struck a chord with me. The presence of the hijab automatically marked Nabila and her friends as different from the mainstream (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). During the final interview, I delved more into this issue with Nabila.

Selena: I really appreciate you and Sanaa for showing me your hair without your hijab. One thing I found interesting was when you were like, “All the kids in school just see me with a hijab. I wish they can see me like this.” What made you say that?
Nabila: Because most people think that just because we wear the hijab and long clothes and stuff means that we’re not pretty or nice or something. They just judge you and if they see that I can look like American too.

Nabila’s explanation indicated that she felt that other students made assumptions about her, both in terms of her physical attributes and her personality, simply because she adhered to the traditional Muslim religious custom in terms of her wardrobe. She wanted students to be able to know her, and neither judge nor exclude her because of her hijab.

Jonathan, meanwhile, admitted he was trying to become more American and socialize mostly with American students. As I observed in his classroom, he would regularly socialize with four male students, three of whom were Caucasian and one biracial. Jonathan admitted he did not have many Chinese friends, and his good friends were American. When I asked him why he had only American friends, he provided the following response:

Compare if it’s like 300 in the school, [then] there’s gonna be like 260 people that’s American and 40 people that’s from another country. And out of that 40 probably only 20, 18, [or] 17 is Chinese so I don’t have much people to talk to. So I kinda, even though I’m not forced, there’s like an invisible force that pushes me to the American side ‘cause I have to.

Jonathan used the idea of proportions to explain why he had more American friends compared to Chinese friends. The invisible force that he mentioned was the lower number of minority students at FMS. Jonathan was exited out of the ESL program when he entered middle school, and his classes were all mainstream ones. Because of this, he did not have many opportunities to engage in interactions specifically with other ELs, but it also seemed as though Jonathan did not seek opportunities to interact with current or former ELs.

For the most part, Jonathan was quite happy about having a solid group of friends in middle school. However, he admitted that he sometimes felt left out when conversing with his American friends.

Sometimes I feel like I’m left out [in conversations] ‘cause I’m Asian, which I don’t know if it’s true. I just feel that way sometimes, but sometimes I don’t. I mean I feel special that I’m Asian, and I can be cool about my race, and I don’t really care if other people make jokes about it.

Although it did not seem that his friends were deliberately excluding him from the conversation, some topics of discussion were ones with which Jonathan was unfamiliar. When his friends discussed popular culture, Jonathan could not offer much to the conversation. For example, he mentioned one instance when his friends were talking about a television show that had aired several years earlier, when Jonathan’s family was still in China. As a result, Jonathan felt left out and could not participate in the conversation because he had nothing to contribute to that topic. During this interview, I shared with Jonathan that I understood how he was feeling, but told him that in some ways, we had the best of both worlds because we were exposed to two cultures. Jonathan agreed, but he added, “Sometimes I wish I was the same.”

Despite the desire to “be more American,” Jonathan still expressed appreciation for his native culture. He highlighted positive aspects of his native culture, such as the importance of Chinese sayings. He said these nuggets of wisdom helped him make sense of what was occurring in his life. Nevertheless, there seemed to be a clear divide for Jonathan between his cultural identities. At home, he was Chinese. In school, he wanted to just be like his American classmates. In interviews and conversations with Jonathan, there seemed to be a struggle in his pride about being Chinese and his desire to be more American. The more prevalent statements he made, though, were about trying to be more American. For example, he proudly mentioned, “I look more like I’m American ’cause I don’t talk in my accent anymore. I talk in English accent.”

For his part, Farshad had assimilated well into the American culture, but he did not seem to overtly reject his native culture nor did he embrace the American culture. Farshad was preoccupied with his status as an EL, which he wanted to hide from his American peers. His shame of being an EL affected his demeanor in his ESL class. He was unmotivated to be in the class because he felt that his English abilities and reading abilities were more suited to a mainstream English classroom. Beyond the academic scope of the ESL classroom, Farshad was embarrassed by some of the activities they completed in the ESL class. Below is a field note excerpt from a
classroom observation, which occurred right before Easter.

When I got to Mrs. Blake’s classroom today, I found out that she had a special activity planned wherein the students would be painting spring eggs. During fifth-period, Sabeen, Amira, and Farshad all helped in getting everything ready such as arranging the tables around the classroom, putting newspapers on the table, and distributing the dyes to each table. When the eighth-graders arrived for sixth-period, the boys joined Farshad at one table and Aina, Nabil, and Sanaa joined the girls at another table. I sat with the boys. As everyone was starting to color the eggs, Farshad got up and closed the classroom door. Emir saw me looking at Farshad as he was closing the door, and without me asking, Emir told me, “He doesn’t want other students to see us doing this. It’s a bit babyish.”

Some of the students, such as Sabeen and Amira, who were fairly new to the U.S., were very excited to color spring eggs since they had never experienced it before. However, Farshad thought these activities were embarrassing. He did not like being part of the “special” classroom that did such “babyish” activities. After he closed the door, though, Farshad and his male classmates seemed more carefree and actually enjoyed the activity. By having closed the classroom door, Farshad’s concern about other students seeing him doing such childish activities dissipated, and he was able to fully participate in this special classroom activity.

I also observed Farshad behaving uneasily about his EL status during a fire drill. Mrs. Blake’s seventh grade ESL class was very small, with only five students, while the other classes had approximately 20 to 25 students. Thus, the small class size automatically differentiated Mrs. Blake’s class from the mainstream classes as each class lined up outside the building. During the entire fire drill, Farshad had an uneasy expression on his face, and he had his arms crossed. Two girls from another class asked Farshad what class he was in. Farshad just shrugged, did not answer their question, and stared straight ahead to avoid further questions.

When I asked him about these instances, Farshad admitted that he felt embarrassed that he was in ESL class. Even though his friends do not say anything about it, Farshad felt that being in ESL class made him different than his friends. He said quietly, “I feel like that I’m not like them. Like I’m not in the good English class.” In our following interview, I delved a little bit deeper into the issue.

Selena: So I wanted to talk a little bit more about what we discussed last time that you felt uncomfortable about being in ESL. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Farshad: Yeah, ‘cause, like my friends, when they see me, they’re like “What’s that special class you go to?” And I’m like, “Uh.”

Selena: Do you tell them?

Farshad: I just ignore them and change the subject.

Farshad does not want his friends to think of him as being different from them, although some of his friends know that he is in ESL class. In Farshad’s view, inclusion in the ESL classroom denoted a low level of English abilities. Farshad tried to hide his status as an EL from as many of his peers as possible because he did not want other students to think he had inferior English skills. He avoided letting his peers know about his inclusion in the ESL class, and he was looking forward to the eighth grade because he would be in the regular English class.

Finally, not much information was obtained about Oliver’s EL identity. He had spent two-thirds of his life in the U.S., and he knew more about the U.S. than he did about Congo and was fully integrated to America.

Discussion

Overall, results of this research indicate that all four components (i.e., motivation, strategic knowledge, constructing meaning from texts, and social interactions) are inextricably linked and are integral parts of middle level ELs’ reading engagement. A missing component can impact the quality of students’ overall reading engagement. Each reading engagement component can be analyzed separately, but collectively each focal student’s case illustrates how the interaction of these components influences each EL’s overall reading engagement. An essential finding was that for most of the focal students, their identity as an EL was an important aspect of their reading engagement.

In terms of motivation, ELs’ motivations for reading and reasons for not reading varied greatly. The two consistent findings were the following: (1) Students were motivated to read when they were able to select reading materials that met their interests, and (2) students were unmotivated to read academic texts. These two conclusions are supported by the reading motivation literature. First, the importance of access
to interesting texts has consistently been found to influence reading motivation (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Gambrell, 1996; Meltzer & Hamann, 2004). The focal students’ motivation to read varied depending on the kinds of texts they were reading. When ELs were able to pursue their reading interests, their motivation to read was high. Second, results of this research provide additional evidence supporting recent studies that found secondary students are unmotivated to read academic texts (Guthrie et al., 2012; McKenna et al., 2012; Pitcher et al., 2007; Wigfield, Cambria, & Ho, 2012). Even high achieving students, such as Jonathan and Nabila, were unmotivated to read informational texts, such as textbooks (Wigfield et al., 2012).

To motivate adolescents to read more informational texts, one of the practices that Guthrie and Klauda (2012) suggested is to provide supplementary texts or materials, especially in cases when the textbook is too challenging for students. All the focal students were continuously working on developing their academic English proficiency. They would have benefitted from having supplementary materials to read that would help bridge their comprehension of difficult portions of the textbook. Another result of using supplementary materials would likely be higher interest levels from students because these materials break up the monotony of using only the textbook (Allington & Gabriel, 2012; Guthrie & Klauda, 2012).

The findings about ELs’ strategic knowledge confirm previous research which found that successful EL readers utilized more reading comprehension strategies (Jimenez, Garcia, & Pearson, 1996). Conversely, Jimenez and colleagues (1996) found that less successful EL readers did not use many comprehension strategies and were less likely to use higher order comprehension skills such as making inferences. I discovered similar findings in this study on the strategic knowledge component. Jonathan and Nabila (who were more able readers) exhibited the use of numerous comprehension strategies, while Farshad (who read below grade level) was unable to exhibit the use of various comprehension strategies. An additional contribution of this research is that for seemingly less successful EL readers, such as Oliver, strategy use can be increased given high interest texts.

Previous studies conducted on ELs’ reading engagement did not focus on their capabilities to construct meaning from texts. For instance, Ivey and Broaddus’s (2007) formative experiment with Latino/a students who were new English readers focused primarily on decoding low-level, beginner texts rather than on increasing these students’ comprehension abilities in English. Thus, this study offers new evidence on how engaged and disengaged readers construct meaning and acquire knowledge from reading. The results showed that ELs who were more highly engaged readers were able to construct extensive meaning from texts.

In terms of social interactions, results of this research supports previous findings that middle level ELs are able to obtain academic support through interactions about texts with others (Cho, Xu, & Rhodes, 2010; Cuero & Dworin, 2007). For example, Cho and colleagues (2010) indicated that ELs served as translators for one another in small group interactions, and Cuero and Dworin (2007) found that ELs shared resources among one another. In this study, providing and obtaining support was a primary purpose of the focal students for participating in social interactions, except for Oliver who did not participate in social interactions. Nabila consistently sought support from the pre-service teachers who interned in the ESL class. Farshad, meanwhile, used social interactions as a way to obtain answers for his academic requirements. As a high achiever, Jonathan did not need support from his peers for his academics and instead provided answers to his peers. When he needed support, Jonathan preferred to ask his teacher, Ms. Costa, for feedback.

Finally, results of the study indicated that focal students’ stances on their EL identities influenced primarily the social interaction component. It affected not only who they interacted with, but it also influenced the quality of interactions. For instance, Nabila engaged in a positive type of social interaction when she engaged in book discussions. However, these discussions were limited to her Muslim friends as Nabila’s outsider status prohibited her from interacting with mainstream students about what she was reading. Jonathan, meanwhile, engaged in social interactions wherein he could be the more knowledgeable other and connect with his American peers who needed his academic support. These group interactions provided him an opportunity to have intellectual currency which increased his worth in the larger social dynamic.

Conclusion

The affective factors affecting reading are often overlooked, particularly with middle school students. This research shows that delving into ELs’ reading engagement can be very beneficial since it provides a wealth of information about students’ motivation, strategic knowledge, conceptual knowledge, and social
interactions, especially in middle school when students are encountering increasingly more complex texts and concepts. This research indicates that all four reading engagement components must be considered in relation to ELs’ reading engagement. Collectively, all four components interact and determine whether or not ELLs will be engaged or disengaged with reading English texts. Aside from the four original components, the results of this case study also explored and indicated the importance of considering identity in relation to reading engagement. Researchers should consider students’ cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds in relation to their reading engagement, especially because cultural responsiveness is a key component of the recently published research agenda for the field of middle level education (Middle Level Education Special Interest Group, 2016). More importantly, middle level practitioners should explore how particular aspects of ELs’ sociocultural backgrounds, including labeling in school as an EL or as an ESL student, might influence their engagement with specific texts or reading situations.

ORCID

Maria Selena Protacio  http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3504-3644

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