

A First Grade Student's Affect and Self-Perception Regarding Literacy

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### Abstract

As I entered the first grade classroom, I sought out Jake who was working quietly near the window. I sat down next to him to get an idea of what he was working on and he did not look up once. I noticed he was writing about his favorite sport. As soon as I asked what his favorite sport was, we were able to have a lively conversation. He told me all about the Miami Dolphins and right away, I brought up that I was a Bills fan. From then on, we were always able to get back into focus by bringing Jake's interests into his activities. He did not always put his full attention in his writing or his surveys, but if they involved his interests, he was on board. I slowly learned that as Jake saw a part of himself in his literacy activities, he was more engaged and confident. This, in turn, impacted his affect and self-perception regarding his literacy. Many components affect the process of how an emergent reader acquires literacy skills. Two major components that can have an impact on an emergent reader's literacy skills are their affect and self-perception. The way a student views themselves concerning their reading and writing skills can impact the literacy skills that they acquire.

*Keywords:* affect, self-perception, emergent reader

## **Section One: Introduction**

### **Problem Statement**

This study investigated how a student's affect and self-perception as a reader and a writer impact his literacy skills. The affect and self-perception of a student may be a concern if it is of a disengaged and negative nature because this can affect how a student views literacy. If a student finds reading and writing unenjoyable and if they do not think they are skilled at it, they may stop trying and fall behind in their classes. Research from Guthrie and Wigfield (2006, 2008, 2009) and Applegate & Applegate (2010) shows that student motivation and student engagement is important for students to have while they are learning about literacy and forming their opinions of it. Student engagement and motivation is correlated strongly with student achievement in literacy (Guthrie and Wigfield, 2006). Since I only researched how one student's affect and self-perception impact their literacy skills, I cannot transfer the information that I find to every student. Each student is different and they may not have the same outcome as the student I am working with in this study. Audiences that may benefit from this knowledge are educators, policymakers, parents, and any individuals who closely work with children. A child's self-perception and affect will influence how they cooperate with class materials, adults and how they learn (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and Early Child Care Research Network, 2002).

**Research Question**

I answered the research question: How does one student's affect and self-perception affect his emergent literacy skills?

**Significance of the Problem**

In the research of Guthrie and Wigfield (2006, 2008, 2009) and Applegate & Applegate (2010), the importance of student affect and self-perception and how they connect to students' literacy skills has been studied. Guthrie and Wigfield, along with various co-researchers (2006, 2008, 2009), have discussed in several studies that a student's motivation is strongly linked to their comprehension, reading and writing skills. When students possess high self-efficacy and they see a personal purpose and a social purpose, they will be more engaged and motivated to read (Guthrie and Wigfield). If a student does not experience these concepts, they will be disengaged and unmotivated with their literacy practices (Guthrie and Wigfield). Applegate and Applegate (2010) explain that thinking meaningfully about text is related to a student's motivation level to read. The student also needs to believe that they will be successful and that there is value in their literacy task in order for them to be engaged in their reading and literacy, overall (Applegate & Applegate). It is important that I measured this student's affect and self-perception so I could see how the research explained above connected to the student's emergent literacy skills.

**Purpose for the Study**

The purpose of my research was to conduct a case study which focused on how one student's affect and self-perception affected his emergent literacy skills. I also intended to analyze how my findings connected with my sources' common messages.

I wanted to explore the effects of this student's affect and self-perception on his emergent literacy skills and if they confirmed or questioned current research.

Before this study began, I had already been working with this student on tasks concerning reading, writing, and processing for two months prior. I knew that this six-year-old student was performing at a low first grade level. His current DRA level was 12. Since I had been working with him before and I knew his performance level, I wanted to explore how that connected to the student's affect and self-perception concerning reading and writing.

### **Rationale**

I believe that is important to know how a student views their own skills and how an activity makes them feel because their attitude will impact their performance and skill set in some way. I was already familiar with Jake's literacy skills from a past case study and I was curious about how Jake's affect and self-perception regarding literacy affected those skills. I wanted to build upon those previous findings and I uncovered further the relationship between this student's affect and self-perception and his emergent literacy skills further. These findings can be used to drive Jake's instruction and differentiate content in a way which is tailored to his specific emergent literacy skills.

### **Summary and Transition into Next Chapter**

During my data collection, I used a mixed methods research design which focused on qualitative and quantitative data. The literacy research methodologies I used included affective measurement, survey research, and ethnographic research in my study (Duke & Mallette, 2011). Quantitative data was collected from four reading and writing attitude surveys. Qualitative data was collected from interviews and ethnographic observations.

Qualitative data was also collected by transferring the numerical data from the surveys into a descriptive explanation of the students' affect and self-perception. Specifically, I collected all of this data to study how one student's affect and self-perception impact his literacy skills. My conceptual framework involves Guthrie and Wigfield, along with various co-researchers (2006, 2008, 2009) and Applegate and Applegate (2010) to explore how affect impacts literacy skills. These, and other guiding texts, will be discussed in the section below.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The process of reading and the concept of affect that connects to it have been studied through countless research practices. These researchers help us to understand just what the connection means. This section will provide an overview of the literature that is relevant to the topic of affect and self-perception and how those concepts connect to how an emergent reader experiences literacy. My study involved several surveys that gauged reader self-perception, writing attitude, and writer self-perception. These results were used to reflect on the emergent reader's motivation level. Throughout my study, I have concluded that there were four areas that were strongly connected to Jake's motivation level. The four areas that were connected to Jake's motivation level were self-concept, perseverance, engagement, and classroom environment.

### **Self-Concept**

Self-concept as a reader affects a child's reading motivation. Children have different levels of motivation and distinct self-concepts and these are closely relied on when children are immersing themselves in content and learning new skills. Research

does show that when students already view themselves negatively and believe their intelligence is fixed, they will be less motivated during these new tasks (Fulmer & Tulis, 2013). A student's self-concept as a reader, and in general, is correlated to their motivation towards actively building on their literacy skills.

Although self-concept impacts literacy skills, it also impacts emotion and distractibility (Hirvonen, Aunola, Alatupa, Viljaranta, & Nurmi, 2013). Researchers analyzed the connection between previous learning experience, temperament, task avoidance, anxiety and helplessness and specifically set out to answer the question: how does a student's mood and distractibility affect task avoidance, helplessness and anxiety? Researchers measured the students' reading and math skills as well as temperament through the study (Hirvonen et al, 2013). The study revealed when student distraction increases, the task avoidance behavior increases as well. The more frequently students avoid a task is closely related to higher levels of anxiety and helplessness. The data also showed that although negative emotions are correlated with task avoidance, they are not predictors of it and that a student's high distractibility predicted high task avoidance. The data also helped explain that students who have low adaptability, who withdraw in novel situations and who are uncomfortable with unfamiliar people are more likely to have helpless behavior. These students may feel uncomfortable with new adults and may not want to work with them which also increases anxiety. These negative emotions may potentially become worse from year to year These negative emotions could gradually be internalized to impact a student's self-concept negatively. In turn, if a student has a negative self-concept, the negative perspective can negatively impact their motivation and attitude towards literacy.



### **Perseverance and Grit**

Mindset, learning from adversity, and perseverance can impact how a student overcomes obstacles they are exposed to in their literacy experience. Dweck and Cain (1995) explain that the way students perceive their intelligence will impact their motivation. Dweck and Cain analyzed the relationship between helplessness, perceived intelligence and perceived challenge. Helplessness is shown by negative ability traits and lack of persistence on challenging tasks. This research shows that 5% of first graders chose the easiest puzzles because they believed they were not good at solving them. It also showed that in first grade mainly, the more helpless children were not able to focus on how grades are a process and not a deciding factor of performance (Dweck and Cain, 1995). Dweck and Cain explained how young helpless children are more likely to believe intelligence is a fixed entity and that motivational patterns can start as early as first grade.

Students also change their ideas about interest and their affect towards certain activities when the task becomes more difficult to complete, especially when the difficulty impacts a student's emotions negatively. Two types of difficulty were observed in Fulmer and Tulis' (2013) study: objective difficulty and perceived difficulty. Objective difficulty refers to the actual readability level of the task and perceived difficulty is pertaining to how difficult the students believe the task is. Perceived difficulty is based on student's cognition, motivation and emotions. The researchers measured the students' reading level with a Lexile test that gave readings 50 points above their actual level. The data showed that student interest and affect declined once the student began reading because the reading level was above their ability. Most likely, if a student does not

already have their own personal grit or perseverance, these situations will deem much more difficult. This high objective difficulty has a negative impact on positive affect. If a student already has a poor affect, they will not be able to adjust to adversity as well as students who confidently rely on their resiliency.

Whether students can overcome a difficult task directly relates to what mindset they have. Dweck (2010) explains that children either have a fixed mindset or a growth mindset. A fixed mindset resorts children into thinking that intelligence is innate and cannot be changed. A person with this type of mindset believes that they are intelligent when they complete a task quickly, easily and without putting forth any effort. People with fixed mindsets also believe that obstacles and putting forth effort is threatening because they think their ability should be natural. People with this mindset believe because intelligence is fixed, putting forth effort means that they are not good at the task at hand. A growth mindset exercises the idea that intelligence is malleable and intelligence can grow and progress. People with growth mindsets believe that no matter what, they are presenting intelligence when they are working hard on something difficult because they are making progress and learning from completing hard tasks. The growth mindset fosters the idea that resilience and overcoming obstacles is beneficial because putting forth effort allows intelligence to progress. Students who have growth mindsets rely more on their own effort and how much work they put into a task and they focus on what they can learn and what they can take with them concerning each lesson. When teachers offer praise that identifies a strong amount of effort, students will begin to develop a growth mindset. This is because the student will realize that effort can help them have perseverance and motivation to complete difficult tasks. If a teacher praises a

student's intelligence, the student will find it difficult to rely on their self-confidence and motivation through challenging tasks because they were not relying on their effort initially. The idea of mindset is important in the classroom and students should be encouraged to try hard even while making mistakes because this is a sign of risk taking and progress.

The ability that children have to stick with a difficult task helps them develop a sense of grit that internalizes their motivation and allows them to persevere (Tough, 2012). During tasks that are not a challenge, individuals do not need to rely on their perseverance as much since they do feel like they can accomplish whatever it is they are working through quite easily. However, when a person feels discouraged or when a person has experienced failure, this is where it is useful to rely on their own grit. This grit is developed from a person's sense of self-control and their mindset that tells them that can overcome their obstacles no matter how difficult the person perceives them to be. Grit can also be characterized as "perseverance and passion for long-term goals (Duckworth, 2007). This means that grit is relied on for an individual to make an investment with the task that they aim to complete. This means that the more grit an individual has, they will not give up in the midst of a process that takes years to master. Even if the person experiences difficulty, or even fails, they will not lose the amount of effort that they started out with in the beginning. The idea of grit is closely related to the idea of stamina. This is a significant concept especially with the idea of literacy as a life-long process to master.

When students do not feel that they can improve through the amount of effort they put in or through the lessons they learn through failure, students begin to feel at a

standstill as they are expected to complete tasks. Students can lose their drive to persevere through difficult tasks for reasons other than the level of their internal grit. The external reward that students receive, or the lack thereof, is one reason for a lower level of motivation. Baker & Wigfield (1999) found that if an assignment did not have an effect on grades, boys were less motivated to do the work. Earning recognition for reading seems to be more important for younger children, more specifically boys, because they value external feedback more than understanding themselves and feeling rewarded intrinsically by learning. The study also explains that if a student does not exercise internal motivation, the student will habitually seek ways to avoid work in the classroom because they do not feel competent while attempting to accomplish tasks. Boys have lower competence beliefs than girls and boys also have a more negative view on reading than girls do. A reader's perseverance is closely related to their motivation and attitude and the reader's perseverance and mindset determine whether they view their knowledge of literacy as a learning process or a fixed entity.

### **Engagement**

A high level of engagement in reading can predict a high level of motivation and a positive attitude toward reading. The Guthrie, Wigfield, and Humenick study (2006) works to find the connection between stimulating tasks and reading motivation. The third grade students were grouped into sections that were provided with a high number of stimulating reading activities and sections that were provided with a low number of stimulating activities. The students were involved in highly engaging science activities such as observations and labs. The study also used an original comprehension measure

and the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Comprehension Test and a student self-report measure and the Motivation for Reading Questionnaire in order to measure the students' level of reading motivation. Guthrie et al (2006) found that an increased level of stimulating tasks is connected to an increased level of motivation. This, in turn, is connected to situational interest which impacts personal interest during reading. Individual interest can stem from situational interest by engaging students in content by supporting them in developing goals, working together, and allowing choices of interesting hands on activities (Guthrie et al 2006). Interest levels can increase by connecting it to situational interest which helps foster intrinsic motivation. When students have this opportunity and are competent, autonomous and relating to their reading than their intrinsic motivation increases even more.

When student preferences are supported, students are more likely to be engaged in the content. When students get a choice in the content they are working with and their preferences are included, the students feel more interested and more engaged. When students are working in classes where the selection does not meet their preferences, students feel limited in the choices that are offered to them (Bang- Jensen, 2010). For example, if students cannot find available books that they enjoy reading for pleasure, they may not want to read anymore altogether. If students are enthusiastic about reading, they will most likely have a favorite book or a favorite author. However, if those favorite books are not available, the students may feel less interested and less engaged while reading. Allowing children choice in the books they read helps foster personal interest and engagement in reading. Currently, students think that enjoyable types of books can be magazines, television and film related, comics or a part of a series (Davila

& Patrick, 2010). Gender roles and social norms have portrayed fiction books and magazines as feminine and gender roles and social norms have portrayed nonfiction books and newspapers as masculine. Therefore, boys are more likely to choose nonfiction books more than girls do. Boys also tend to enjoy reading “gory” or “gross” books and informational books about video games or sports. Contrarily, girls tend to enjoy reading realistic fiction books and romance novel (Davila & Patrick, 2010). It is important to note that as readers become more dependent on technology as a global society, reading styles and interests will be dependent on these changes. Students need to have the opportunity to choose books that reflect their interests and their environment because it will increase their engagement with literacy. This engagement level is strongly related to their motivation level.

Student book selection is also important because it can affect a reader's identity. Book choices affect students' preferences in genre, their power of choice and their flexibility to look at books from different perspectives (Bang- Jensen, 2010). Reader choice is connected to high motivation levels and high engagement levels. Programs such as the Dorothy Carfield Fisher Children's Book Award Program have a goal to help students have enthusiasm toward the content they are reading through student ability to choose. In this program, students read a myriad of books and then they vote on which one they enjoyed reading the most. The book that is the most popular earns the students a book talk from the book's author. Programs like these encourage choice, interest and student engagement. Book choice can also affect engagement through social interaction. Social interaction is fostered because peers usually discuss with others who enjoy reading the same content or the students recommend books to their peers who are not

familiar with the specific content. This level of interaction pertaining to literacy is engaging students through reading and interacting. This study shows that when students get an opportunity to choose text that reflects their interests, they are encouraged to develop a reader identity and form lasting relationships with books which keeps them engaged (Bang-Jensen, 2010). Book choice also allows a child to understand what kind of books they enjoy and they have the opportunity to learn about themselves as readers. When students are involved in stimulating activities and when students have a personal interest in the text, they will feel more engaged in their literacy and therefore, more motivated in their literacy experience.

### **Classroom Environment**

Research shows that students who feel more comfortable and encouraged in their classroom environment are more engaged during class. This higher level of engagement is related to a higher level of motivation (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and Early Child Care Research Network, 2002). Their research shows that first graders were more positively involved in their classroom environment when their teachers offered high emotional and instructional support (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development and Early Child Care Research Network, 2002). When the students received high emotional support, they were more engaged in their tasks, more positive during peer interaction and less negative toward their teachers. When the students received high instructional support, the same results were evident. These results of high engagement are directly correlated to high levels of motivation. The data also showed that the level of emotional or instructional support was not impacted by the ratio of children to adults in the classroom or class size.

When students feel that they are in a classroom environment that values and appreciates their own experiences and perspectives, the students will most likely feel more valued as an individual and the student will also see more value in the class content. Students bring their personal experiences, or funds of knowledge, to their classroom and this impacts their understanding and their interpretation of the content (Moll, 1992). When students are encouraged to share the practices and customs that they learn at home with their families in their classrooms, they feel more connected to their classmates and their teacher. In addition to a student's funds of knowledge, they also bring their own unique situated literacies into the classroom (Street, 1984). Situated literacies are different for each child because this concept pertains to in what context the child has experienced literacy. For example, a child who grew up working on a farm will have far different situated literacies than a child growing up working in a restaurant. Situated literacies are those contexts that children rely on to make meaning of the language and to create a personal understanding for themselves. Situated literacies are an important part of a classroom because they are what help a child feel understood and effective in their literacy experience.

Students also value the content they are engaging with when they receive the opportunity to make it their own. The process of writing is important to teach children instead of simply teaching them to get to the end product of a polished draft. Along the way, students will learn the importance of revising and reflecting on their own work (Calkins, 2015). This, in turn, will help them learn the importance of perseverance through a challenging task which can promote a growth mindset. As students push through the drafting process, they are allowed the opportunity to really discover



themselves as writers and to build confidence in themselves. Once the process has been completed and students have created their final product, the concept of publishing is even more engaging. When students can present their own creative ideas to others, they are taking ownership of their ideas and their thoughts and they are highly engaged in content. This is a prominent notion in the classroom.

Self- concept, perseverance, engagement, and classroom environment all are components that affect a reader's level of motivation and attitude. If students are successful with these components, then they will most likely have a high motivation and a positive attitude concerning literacy. If students are struggling with any of these components, then they will most likely have low motivation and a negative attitude concerning literacy. These articles explain thoroughly the concepts behind a reader's motivation and the connections they have to literacy.

### **Chapter Three: Applications and Evaluation**

#### **Introduction**

This research design was a mixed methods case study of how reader self-perception and affect impact emergent literacy skills. Through observations, surveys and the use of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Straus, 1967), I analyzed one student's behaviors and attitudes while he was reading and writing in his classroom. I categorized the data that I collected throughout my study into themes and topics that were relevant to this reading process and self-perception.

#### **Participants**

I worked with one first grade student during this study. I made a purposeful selection with this first grade student because in a past case study, I already reflected on

his skills in emergent literacy. I wanted to build upon those findings and I further uncovered the relationship between his affect and self-perception and his emergent literacy skills. Jake was a first grade student who was six years old at the time. He was working at a DRA level of 12 for independent reading and a DRA level of 14 for instructional reading. At a DRA level of 12, Jake could independently self-correct errors, chunk large words, and simultaneously rely on semantic cues, syntactic cues, and graphophonemic cues to read fluently. At a DRA level of 14, Jake could read fluently and monitor a text for meaning with the support of a teacher. During our time together, he was shy, withdrawn and had a difficult time asking questions when he was unsure of content. He engaged in conversation but only when spoken to and, in those instances, he offered minimal response. I learned during our study that at home, he spent time with his mother and father and that he also spent time with his older brother playing video games.

While in kindergarten, Jake had an occupational therapist and he was targeted for RTI. He did not have those accommodations during his first grade year. In first grade, Jake was skilled at math and reasoning and was lacking in his reading and writing skills. He struggled with holding his pencil in the correct form while writing and this made writing a difficult and frustrating activity for him. In his first grade classroom, he was fluent in his oral reading skills, but he performed at a less than average level in writing tasks. Jake said that he enjoyed reading more than writing. I did know that Jake was more engaged in his reading and writing when his interests and experiences are involved from my previous study before this data collection. Although he was more engaged, this did not imply that he was always thoroughly focused in his work. I was

not aware of Jake's attitude toward reading nor am I aware of his self-perception as a reader and a writer before this study. In my previous case study, I asked him what he enjoyed reading and writing about, but I did not question how he felt about himself while doing these activities until this research.

### **Setting**

In Jake's elementary school, there were 1049 K-6 students enrolled in the 2013-2014 school year and 124 of them were first graders. The school population consisted of 92% white students, 4% Hispanic students, and 1% each was African American, Asian, and Multiracial students in 2013-2014. Within the school population in 2013-2014, 10% of students had disabilities and 29% of students were economically disadvantaged. Jake is a white male six-year-old student. He has not been diagnosed with any type of disability and he does not experience economic disadvantages.

During his first grade year Jake's class had 20 students working under one first grade teacher, a teacher aide, a push in Special Education teacher and a push in speech teacher. There were five different tables with a carpet area and three computers for student use. There were also several bookshelves and book baskets available for student use. The students had a book corner in the room where they could read after they were finished with their assignments. The students each had folders and materials to be used at their own tables. At the time I observed, the students were involved in a writer's workshop. The students had about 40 minutes for writing instruction, processing, and editing. The students had ten minutes at the end of class to share their writing. The students sat in a circle on the classroom rug and the speaker

who was sharing would speak into a microphone so all of the students could hear them clearly.

### **Positionality**

During the time of the data collection, I was employed as a one-to-one teacher aide in the district that this first grade student was enrolled in. Although I did not work at his school, I had been working with him for two months for a different case study regarding emergent literacy skills. Since I was employed by this district, I had the opportunity to connect with the students and teachers in order to carry out this research. I was also a graduate student studying Literacy Education (B-12) at the College at Brockport, State University of New York (SUNY) and my pending graduation date is still currently in the summer of 2016. I earned my Bachelor's of Science in Adolescence Education degree and my Bachelors of Arts in English degree from the State University of New York (SUNY) at Oswego. I earned my Associates in Arts degree from Monroe Community College. I spent my childhood in the area where I am currently researching. I also live in the area and work in the area currently.

I am interested in how a student's image of themselves and the skills that they possess impact their skills and how they perform with them. I do believe that a student's affect and self- perception is connected to a student's skills and I am curious about how this connects to the student I am working with.

### **Procedures of Study**

I worked with one first grade male student while I collected my data. During the time of my data collection, I observed my participant twice a week for 45 minutes. The data collection lasted six weeks, between April 2015 and May 2015. For one day each

week, I acted as a participant observer who worked alongside the participant while he was in writer's workshop in his first grade class. This means that for the second observation session during the weeks, I strictly observed and did not interact with the participant at all. This means that I observed and took notes on Jake by watching his actions, facial expressions, and communication.

While I conducted my research, I relied on several attributes of teacher research. I used writing and reporting classroom inquiry. For this type of inquiry, I utilized two types of writing and reporting which are narrative and illustrative. I recorded information by taking observational narrative notes and by collecting data from surveys and interviews. I also practiced pragmatic teacher research methods as well as instructive and clarifying teacher inquiry and reflective teacher research. I practiced pragmatic teacher research methods by using modes that were the most practical and efficient to answer my research question. The most efficient mode was to observe and to collect data from surveys. I used instructive and clarifying teacher inquiry because I learned from the student I observed through the research process and I used this information to help me make sense of the world inside the participant's classroom. I took part in reflective teacher research by consistently reflecting on what I observed and thinking about how it related to literacy and the theory that I studied pertaining to it (Baumann & Duffy-Hester, 2002).

### **Instruments for Study**

During the weeks, I asked the participant questions regarding self-perception and affect through surveys and interviews. I collected data using five instruments altogether. I conducted assessments with the student using Writing Attitude Survey (McKenna, M. C.,

& Kear, D.J, 1990), a Writer Self-Perception Scale (Henk, W.A. & Melnick, S.A., 1997), and a Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk, W.A. & Melnick, S.A., 1995) to inquire about his level of motivation toward literacy and his perceived skills. I also interviewed the student about his attitude about reading and writing. Gathering data from the affective instruments and literacy assessments has shown the student's affect and self-perception regarding literacy and his overall literacy skills.

### **Criteria for Trustworthiness**

To ensure credibility in this research study, I developed a proposal of my research topic and research process. The Institutional Review Board at SUNY Brockport approved my proposal. I was involved in a prolonged engagement with this first grade student during my time collecting data. I worked with him over a six-week time frame. I observed him regularly and recorded my findings. I also used triangulation of data collection since I collected information from my observations and field notes, interviews, and surveys. I developed questions and I used surveys that came from trustworthy published sources. The surveys that I used were published and have been used by thousands of educators. Using these particular surveys have helped teachers measure their students' feelings about and motivation toward reading. These surveys can be used for individual students or these surveys can be used for a whole class. Teachers can use the information they find from the results of the surveys to channel students' interests which may help them feel more motivated in the process of learning literacy (Malloy, J.A., Marinak, B.A., Gambrell, L.B., & Mazzoni, S.A., 2013). I informed the principal, the teacher and the parents of the student I worked with regarding my process of collecting data and what components would be included in the research. I also

informed the student about the assessments they completed with me. I obtained consent from each member who was connected to the student and the student himself. I also read and analyzed multiple sources that discussed the concept of student affect and self-perception and how they were related to a student's skills. These sources came from credible and trustworthy articles and studies. I reviewed those research articles and I synthesized them to find how they were similar to each other, how they were different from each other, and how they informed my research. During the time of my data collection, I observed my participant twice a week for 45 minutes. The data collection lasted six weeks. For one day each week, I acted as a participant observer who worked alongside the participant while he was in writer's workshop in his first grade class. For the second observation session during the weeks, I strictly observed and did not interact with the participant at all. During the weeks, I also asked the participant questions regarding self-perception and affect through surveys and interviews. I collected data using five instruments altogether.

### **Limitations**

Procedures of this research study that experienced limitations include member checks and transferability. Regarding member checks, I was the only researcher collecting data and recording field notes during my time in my case study. This means that I did not work with other people to check accuracy of my data or data analysis and reporting. Regarding transferability, I only focused my research on one student during my six-week engagement. Because I focused on one individual student, the results and findings that I collected are not transferable to a larger population.

### **Chapter Four: Analysis**

I used a coding process for interpreting and analyzing my data. First, I went through my observational notes. Then, I divided the notes into times that I acted as a participant observer and other times where I went into the participant's classroom to strictly observe. Then, I went through the surveys the participant took and I found similar themes. This meant that I found similar themes across both forms of observation and my survey results. I used this process to help answer the question regarding how the participant's self-perception and affect impacts his literacy skills. My research involved triangulation of my data since I collected data using interviews, surveys, and two specific types of observation. This allowed for more accuracy in responding to my research question.

I categorized themes across my surveys by reading through each result and comparing similarities and differences. The surveys I used were the Reader Self-Perception Scale, the Writer Self-Perception Scale, the Motivations for Reading Questionnaire, and the Writing Attitude Survey. I also used an interview that I created regarding reading, writing, and the participant's views. These results that I found in the surveys were also found in my multiple observations which occurred over a six-week time period. I found each theme by finding examples from all methods of data collection.

The purpose of my study was to analyze how one first grade student's affect and self-perception impacts his emergent literacy skills. I wished to explore the effects of this student's affect and self-perception on his emergent literacy skills and if the effects confirm or question current research.



I discovered themes within my findings both by observing and by surveying the participant. I recognized the participant was self-aware of his abilities, the participant had a positive attitude towards progress, the participant's level of interest affected his engagement, and the participant had a positive perception of the social feedback he received.

### **Finding One: Jake is Self-Aware of his Abilities**

Firstly, I recognized that Jake was aware of his own abilities regarding literacy. Jake was able to identify his strengths and weaknesses which in turn helped him identify when he did not have the appropriate skills for a task or when he did not believe his ideas were good enough. Additionally, Jake's self-awareness increased his negative comparisons between his own skills and his peers' skills.

Jake viewed himself more negatively when compared to his peers and he also seemed to use this perception to be aware of the level of his literacy skills. Even though Jake performed at one of the lowest levels in his class, he advocated for himself when he was not sure how to spell a word correctly or begin a transition phrase. This advocacy was observed through multiple observations in the classroom. As Jake worked, he looked back in his own writing when prompted to check accurate spelling. When he worked independently, he asked peers, checked posters that helped identify the words and he used models created by the classroom teacher. When Jake was unsure, he would walk around the room to compare his work accuracy. I saw this through many observations in Jake's classroom. On May 11, 2015, Jake looked at an anchor chart in the classroom to aid him in structuring sentences for opinion writing. On May 14, 2015, Jake used the word walls to check spelling of words he was uncertain of and he also looked back in his

own writing to compare to previously correctly spelled words. On May 18, 2015, Jake checked the anchor chart in the classroom to aid him in sentence structure regarding opinion writing. On May 21, 2015, I worked alongside Jake. When he was unsure of a word, he would ask me for the spelling. Either, he would use inventive spelling, I would help him sound out the letters phonetically or, if it was available in the classroom, he would compare the spelling to a display. Although he had a low self-perception of himself as a reader and writer, he was quite self-aware of his skills. He seemed to be aware when he was deficient in his writing and spelling skills. This awareness encouraged his access to resources that modeled the skill and helped him build on his own known skills. Frequently in my observations, I noticed Jake check anchor charts and posters to assist him in his writing when he was unsure. This advocacy happened only when he was working independently without staff assistance.

Jake was able to recognize his literacy skills and, overall, had a resulting negative self-perception. He had an indifferent attitude towards reading and writing. Jake shared that when he received a writing assignment in the past, “sometimes [it was] hard” and writing was especially difficult when he wrote sloppier than usual (Jake, 13 May 2015). Jake explained writing was only exciting when he came up with an idea that was good and through my multiple observations, I found that it was a rare occurrence that Jake believed that his ideas were good. Additionally, when I asked Jake questions regarding his self-perception as a writer, he answered many of them negatively. I asked him questions such as “How would you feel if you were an author who writes books?”, “How would you feel if you had a job as a writer for a newspaper or magazine?”, and “How would you feel if you could write more in school?” and Jake answered all of the

questions negatively (20 May 2015). Through Jake's interview regarding writing and the survey regarding his writer self-perception, I learned that Jake did not think highly of his own writing skills or ideas.

Since Jake recognized his own strengths and weaknesses, he was also able to match these up to his peers in his classroom. When he experienced struggle with his own writing, he compared his own writing process and product to that of his peers. As observed through my visits, I noticed that when Jake hit a roadblock in his writing process, he talked with peers to see what point the peers had gotten to in their own writing. On May 18, 2015, Jake focused on his tablemates and asked them what they were writing about. He also asked them how many pages of writing they completed. On May 28, 2015, Jake was very distracted and frequently looked at other tablemates' writing and read their work aloud. He would also ask what page the tablemates had completed and he would announce to his table what page he had completed so far. Generally, Jake viewed his reading and writing skills more negatively when compared to his peers' skills. This negative perception of observational comparison was seen in the results of his Writer Self-Perception Scale and his Reader Self-Perception Scale (please see Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 below).

<b>Writer Self-Perception Scale Results</b>				
	<b>Progress</b>	<b>Observational Comparison</b>	<b>Social Feedback</b>	<b>Physiological States</b>
<b>Raw Score</b>	37/45	10/30	35/45	27/40
<b>Score Interpretation</b>	Average to Low Self-Perception	Low Self-Perception	Average to High Self-Perception	Average to Low Self-Perception

Figure 4.1. Writer self-perception scale results. These survey results illustrate Jake’s self-perception regarding writing.

<b>Reader Self-Perception Scale Results</b>					
	<b>General Progress</b>	<b>Specific Progress</b>	<b>Observational Comparison</b>	<b>Social Feedback</b>	<b>Physiological States</b>
<b>Raw Score</b>	29/40	27/35	19/45	30/35	23/30
<b>Score Interpretation</b>	Low Self-Perception	Average to Low Self-Perception	Low Self-Perception	Average to High Self-Perception	Average to High Self-Perception

Figure 4.2. Reader self-perception scale results. These survey results illustrate Jake’s self-perception regarding reading.

**Finding Two: Jake has a Positive Attitude Towards Progress**

Secondly, I recognized Jake had a positive attitude towards his own progress in his literacy skills. I observed that Jake had a generally positive attitude towards progress.

When Jake was working, he was being productive in either writing his thoughts or drawing pictures that connected to his thoughts. Multiple times during writer’s workshop, Jake would return to previous work to draw pictures for the words connected to

previously finished stories and I also observed Jake's ability to connect his drawings to the meaning that his text conveyed. Jake even told me he enjoyed the drawing aspect of writing stories in his interview assessment (Jake, 13 May 2015). Overall, the pictures that Jake drew connected accurately to the meaning of his text. Writing topics that connected to his drawings included his favorite season and his favorite holiday. Jake was skilled at identifying the main idea of a passage and representing them in picture form.

When Jake went back and added drawings to his writing, it showed that his thoughts were moving forward and that he was thinking about connections and how he could connect with his writing more than he did initially. These observations showed that Jake had a positive attitude towards progress generally. Jake brought his own socially situated literacies (Street, 1984) and funds of knowledge (Moll, 2005) to the classroom when he drew pictures for understanding. Since Jake felt comfortable drawing, he used that as a way to express his thoughts as well as in his writing. For Jake, drawing was a way to express meaning without words. Since he was familiar with drawing pictures and had experience with it, drawing was a component of Jake's funds of knowledge regarding literacy.

### **Finding Three: Jake's Level of Interest Affects his Engagement**

Thirdly, I recognized Jake's level of interest affected his engagement. I found that Jake was disengaged and less invested in his writing when he lacked interest in the topic. Contrarily, I found that Jake was more engaged and invested in his writing when he was interested in what he was writing about. Jake's interest level impacted his level of engagement.

When Jake lacked an interest in the topic he was supposed to write about in writer's workshop, I observed him talking to peers instead of writing. On May 11, 2015, Jake was assigned to write about an opinion and to support it with examples. During my observation, Jake wrote for a total of fifteen minutes in an hour time period and he was holding his head, wiggling around, tapping his pencil and pretending to sleep. The only time he wrote was when he was working with a staff member in the classroom. On May, 18, 2015, Jake was to choose whether he liked cats or dogs better and he was supposed to share his opinion in writing. During my observation, Jake was unfocused. He was talking to other classmates who were working, looking around at his other tablemates' completed work, and playing with his water bottle. On June 1, 2015, Jake's assignment was to write about his favorite holiday. In the hour that I observed him, I did not see him complete any work, He was working quietly, but he was tapping his head, playing with his pencil, and pretending to write whenever the classroom teacher looked in his direction. As he wrote on his paper, he would either cross words out or erase them afterwards. Jake was unfocused and inattentive. He did not complete as much of a task as he would have if he were more interested in the topic. In the interview assessment, Jake mentioned he found it difficult to come up with ideas while writing (Jake, May 13, 2015). Since Jake's interests in a literacy activity determine whether he completed his task, this affected how much practice Jake got in activities, especially in writer's workshop. The more frequently a child writes, the more practice they will have the opportunity for which may lead to building skills in literacy (Applegate & Applegate, 2010).

When Jake was interested in the topic during writer's workshop, he was highly engaged. Throughout the time we worked together, I learned Jake enjoyed topics that had

to do with sports, video games, animals, and food (Jake, May 13, 2015). During these reading and writing activities, Jake seemed attentive and focused. For example, on May 14, 2015, Jake wrote about his favorite video game. He completed four pages of writing connected to this topic and he shared his writing at the end with his classmates. When Jake was able to sit in the circle of his peers and read his story on a microphone, he had the chance to publish his thoughts and share them. Since Jake was interested in the topic of his writing, he was engaged enough to take his ideas from the page and reveal them to others. Jake felt invested enough in his own writing to show it to his peers. As a developing writer, the idea of investment and engagement is crucial for Jake (Calkins, 2015).

#### **Finding Four: Jake has a Positive Perception of the Social Feedback He Receives**

Fourthly, I recognized Jake had a positive perception of the social feedback he received. However, through my observations, I started to believe it could be possible that Jake was learning habits that may lead to learned helplessness in the classroom.

Through my observations with Jake, I noticed he has a positive perception of feedback from his teachers and other staff. I noticed that he was very comfortable receiving feedback. Jake responded to prompting and was able to easily communicate with staff when they reviewed his work. On May 11, 2015, the only time Jake wrote was for a total of fifteen minutes when the classroom teacher was working alongside him. During this time, he was receiving personal attention through the teacher's questions. She helped Jake think of different ideas, she asked him more about his further reasons for his opinion of why he likes iPads, and she helped him sound out letters for words he was spelling. After the fifteen minutes, the classroom teacher held a sharing time where

students could share their writing. Jake did not volunteer, but the teacher involved Jake's writing as an exemplary piece and she had an interactive conversation with him about his piece in front of the class. This example shows Jake receiving personal attention from his classroom teacher. This is important because Jake was comfortable working with his teacher individually and he was comfortable in front of his peers when she modeled his writing. When Jake's teachers work with him, he seems to be more engaged in his literacy. Additionally, on May 21, 2015, I worked with Jake and I prompted him to think of more reasons of why his favorite season is winter. We reflected on what he already wrote together and I asked him why else he enjoyed winter in our conversation. Every time he came up with a new idea, I would prompt him to write it down. On May 28, 2015, Jake was working with a push-in special education teacher on a piece about his reasons for why he was ready for second grade. Jake constantly checked in with her for validation regarding sentence structure and spelling. The teacher showed him an anchor chart that displayed sentence starters for opinion writing and Jake would check this often. These are examples of times that Jake worked effectively and productively with an adult.

Although Jake is a shy boy, he was able to communicate and respond to prompts while in his writing process. Jake also believed his teachers were very encouraging and his teachers genuinely liked what he wrote about. This concept was seen through his results on his Writer Self-Perception Scale and his Reader Self-Perception Scale (please see Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 as presented earlier). These results show that Jake thought positively of himself when he received feedback from others. When he received comments, suggestions, or praise, his self-image was built on in a positive



way. His ability to accept and listen to feedback could help improve his literacy skills since he was open to receiving help and constructive criticism. Since he has accepted help when it was offered to him, the acceptance may aid him in reinforcing his literacy skills in the future.

Although Jake was comfortable receiving feedback, I noticed that sometimes he would rely on the feedback too much. On days where I did not act as a participant observer and when Jake did not work with any other staff member, Jake was reluctant to work and did not complete as much writing as he would have while working cooperatively. This aspect of helplessness could potentially impact “Jake’s” literacy skills negatively.

On May 18, 2015, Jake was not writing in writer’s workshop until a staff member sat with him and prompted him to think about the question he was to answer in his writing. During this time, he was more focused on writing. She sat at the table after her prompting and just the fact that she was in close proximity helped Jake write in a more focused fashion. On May 21, 2015, I worked with Jake and prompted him several times to help him think of reasons that his favorite season is winter. During this session of writer’s workshop, Jake completed three pages of writing.

Contrarily, on May 28, Jake did not complete any pages of writing. I was observing in a different location of the classroom without interacting with him and he looked over at me several times and did not write for the entire class period. A staff member came in to check in with Jake about his writing, but when she walked away, he did not write down his thoughts. On June 1, 2015, Jake was writing a piece about his favorite holiday. When I entered the room, he was working quietly and he did not notice

that I had arrived. I sat in a different location of the classroom without interacting with him during this time. When he looked up, he saw me sitting at the other table and he stopped writing for the remainder of writer's workshop. This observation helped me see that Jake relies on personal instruction too much at times. It appeared as if he expected his teachers to check in with him at times when he was not completing a task individually. During this observation, Jake did not want to write independently without an adult present. Jake also avoided his work when he was not receiving personal attention and even when he was receiving personal attention, he did not respond to it at certain times which encouraged the staff to give him even further attention. Furthermore, Jake's results on his Motivations for Reading Questionnaire showed that he has very low motivation to comply when it comes to reading and completing assignments (See Figure 4.3 below). It is questionable if the feedback and assistance Jake received was helpful because he relied on it so much for validation.

<b>Motivations for Reading Questionnaire Results</b>		
	<b>Raw Score</b>	<b>Score Interpretation</b>
<b>Reading Recognition</b>	4	High Motivation
<b>Importance of Reading</b>	4	High Motivation
<b>Reading for Grades</b>	4	High Motivation
<b>Reading Efficacy</b>	3.25	Medium Motivation
<b>Aesthetic Enjoyment</b>	3.5	Medium Motivation
<b>Reading Competition</b>	3	Medium Motivation
<b>Reading Challenge</b>	2.2	Low Motivation
<b>Reading Curiosity</b>	2	Low Motivation
<b>Reading Work Avoidance</b>	2	Low Motivation
<b>Compliance</b>	5	Low Motivation
<b>Social Reasons for Reading</b>	2.7	Low Motivation

Figure 4.3. Motivations for reading questionnaire results. These survey results show what motivates Jake to read.

## **Section Five: Conclusions and Implications**

### **Conclusions**

During this study, I made several conclusions. They are that a) student interest fosters student engagement, b) student self-perception impacts mindset, c) teacher classroom expectations should not stifle student performance, d) student drafting and publishing is beneficial, and e) teacher feedback could lead to an overreliance of validation.

**Student interest fosters student engagement.** My first conclusion is that student interest fosters student engagement. I learned this through my work with Jake by

observing different results when Jake was interested in the content than when he was uninterested. When Jake was interested, he wrote more during his writer workshop time and he was willing to share his ideas. When Jake was uninterested, Jake did not write as much as when he was interested and he was more distracted from his writing. This information may relate to others students as well. When students are interested in the topic that they are working with, they are more likely to be engaged and invested in the content in the classroom (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Humenick, 2006).

**Student self-perception impacts mindset.** My second conclusion is that student self-perception impacts mindset. I learned this through my work with Jake by observing and collecting data regarding Jake's negative observational comparisons to peers. I also observed Jake depending on teacher feedback when he was unsure of what to write next. Both of these records indicate that Jake has a fixed mindset. However, the instances in where I observed Jake checking spelling and conveying meaning through pictures shows that Jake is persevering through difficult tasks. This means that Jake is slowly developing a growth mindset that will help him overcome his struggles in the writing process. This information may relate to others students as well. When students have a positive mindset regarding their interaction with literacy in the classroom, they may have a positive experience in their classroom (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007). It is better for a student to have a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset because this means the student is comfortable taking risks and that they see the value in learning from their mistakes (Dweck, 2010). This can connect with a positive student affect and a positive self-perception.

**Teacher classroom expectations should not stifle student performance.** My third conclusion is that teacher classroom expectations should not stifle student performance. In my work with Jake, I observed that Jake's classroom expectations seemed to undervalue Jake's situated literacies. Jake was expected to write at a certain time and draw at a certain time and through my observations, I found that this discouraged Jake. Instead of being appreciated for being able to convey meaning, Jake appeared to be falling behind to his teachers because he was not following classroom procedures although he was making his own meaning. This information may relate to others students as well. While students are expected to follow classroom protocol, a teacher's expectations should not be the sole indicator of a student's performance. Students bring their own funds of knowledge (Moll, 1992) and socially situated literacies (Street, 1984) to the classroom and students use this to make meaning and create an understanding. This notion should be accepted in the classroom and teachers should reflect on this as they offer differentiation in classroom activity.

**Student drafting and publishing is beneficial.** My fourth conclusion is that student drafting and publishing is beneficial. When I observed Jake while he was sharing his writing, he received positive feedback from his teachers and from his peers. The recognition that Jake received encouraged him to take ownership of his writing and to be engaged in classroom writing. This information may relate to others students as well. When students are allowed to share their final product, student engagement can also increase. Drafting and publishing student work is beneficial because it allows students to take ownership of their ideas and their thoughts (Calkins, 2015).

**Teacher feedback impacts reliance of validation.** My fifth conclusion is that teacher feedback could lead to an overreliance of validation. As I observed Jake, I noticed the amount of feedback that he received seemed to determine how much he wrote in a class period. I observed that he would not write with focus unless I or a teacher was working alongside him offering feedback and encouragement. The times where he did not work with a teacher, he was distracted, unfocused, and he was not writing. This information may relate to others students as well. While a student is drafting and developing their own ideas in their work students may receive encouraging feedback from their teacher. The feedback a student receives may not help in the way the person offering feedback intended it to because it could validate a student's ideas too much. This anticipation of validation could cause the student to become unconfident without the feedback. The student may learn a process of helplessness by relying on feedback from staff too much as a result. (Fulmer & Tulis, 2013).

**Summary of Conclusions.** When students are interested in their lesson content, when they have a positive mindset, and when students are comfortable with the specific and warm feedback they receive from teachers, they may have a positive experience in their classroom. This can connect with a positive student affect and a positive self-perception.

### **Implications for Jake and all Students**

During this study, I have developed several implications that may benefit Jake as well as other students in the future. These implications may improve engagement, self-perception, and affect. The implications I suggest for Jake and all teachers and students in

general are to a) offer more choice, b) teach more strategies which encourage independence, and c) assign more open ended guidelines

**Student choice.** Specifically, if Jake is more interested in his topics of writing, then Jake will most likely write more and be more focused. I observed that Jake was more engaged in his writing when he could write about things he was interested in. Jake would benefit from having more choice in the topics of his writing assignments (Bang-Jensen, 2010). Generally, students will be more engaged and they will be more likely to see a part of themselves in the lessons if they are interested in the content. This means teachers should ask for feedback from their students so they can channel student interests and incorporate them in lessons (Bang-Jensen, 2010). Teachers should give students the opportunity to work with topics that they choose. Student choice can lead to higher engagement (Bang-Jensen, 2010).

**Strategies for independence.** Specifically, since Jake has accepted help when it was offered to him, the acceptance of help and feedback may aid him in enforcing his literacy skills in the future. Jake would benefit from learning strategies regarding asking specific questions when he feels he needs help. This would help because I observed that when Jake feels unsure, he cannot recognize a specific area he needs help with. I also feel he would benefit from more check ins from his teacher as a refocusing tactic. (Valencia & Buly, 2004). This would be useful for Jake because he would still be encouraged in his work, but he would not a constant support which would slowly help build more accountability with his idea development. Generally, when teachers offer students feedback, the teacher's feedback should be specific and constructive. A teacher should

also teach students strategies to rely on themselves to develop their ideas (Valencia & Buly, 2004).

**Open ended guidelines.** Specifically, since Jake enjoys drawing, I think he should receive more time to construct his own meaning rather than stick to the rigid assignment guidelines because Jake finds value in that type of literacy (Valencia & Buly, 2004). I observed that Jake was able to convey meaning through his drawings as he took a break from his writing and I think that is valuable because Jake is able to work at his own pace and convey his own meaning. Generally, teachers should not create as strict guidelines to assignments because this could stifle student creativity and engagement. Broader guidelines allow students to feel more connected to the work that they develop because they value the mode of situated literacy more than a rigid mode the teacher assigns them. (Valencia & Buly, 2004).

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

A suggestion for myself as a researcher is that I can continue on with observing Jake as he progresses into higher grade levels and I can record any changes in his affect or self-perception. A suggestion for other researchers is that they can focus on the same research question to investigate student affect and self-perception. They can focus on one individual student as I did or they can research an entire class of students.

### **Overall Significance of the Study**

It is important that I measured this student's affect and self-perception so I could see how the research explained throughout my study connected to the student's emergent literacy skills. This study is significant because it focuses on the unique traits of one individual student and how his affect and self-perception impact how he practices his



literacy skills. This information can be used to work with him in the future.

Although my work with one student is not transferable, my work can lend support to other future research.

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