Zoom: A Review of the Literature on Marginalized Adolescent Readers, Literacy Theory, and Policy Implications

Judith K. Franzak
Montana State University

The achievement of adolescent literacy learners has become a significant topic of research and policy. This review of literature links current literacy learning theories, research that addresses the individualized nature of adolescent readers, and the literature delineating adolescent literacy policy. Researchers using naturalistic inquiry have studied adolescent readers from a variety of perspectives; interview-based studies show adolescents having some commonalities in reading preferences. Current pedagogical models include reader response, strategic reading, and critical literacy; each model has benefits and drawbacks for marginalized readers. Adolescent literacy policy fosters the belief that we are in a crisis that calls for intervention. The article concludes with recommendations for policy and research that would better serve marginalized adolescent readers.

KEYWORDS: adolescent readers, reading, reading policy, struggling readers.

Istavan Banyai’s picture book Zoom (1995) opens with what appears to be an abstract painting. Thirty pages later, the book concludes with a picture of a small white dot surrounded by vast blackness. The pages between these striking images take the reader on a visual journey from an urban intersection to the Arizona desert, to a remote island. This is a book that might appeal to struggling readers; after all, there are no words to get in the way. It appealed to me. Turning each page with curiosity, I could not imagine where I would go next. The pleasure I experienced reading this book stayed with me for the rest of the day and is with me still. The book presents a compelling illustration of how context makes a difference in what we believe we see and know. By zooming out into ever-larger views, the reader understands that phenomena are always framed by a bigger picture.

Banyai’s concept of “zoom” is useful for exploring the experiences of adolescents who have been identified as marginalized readers. As reading policy increasingly drives instruction and assessment (Kamil, Mosenthal, Pearson, & Barr, 2000), the experiences of marginalized adolescent readers are shaped by forces far removed from their classrooms and homes. To more fully understand these experiences, it is necessary to situate the literature on adolescent readers in the larger contexts of theory and policy. This review of literature links current literacy learning theories, research that addresses the individualized nature of adolescent readers, and the literature delineating adolescent literacy policy. Exploring the connections between
Franzak

these three separate areas of inquiry, I argue that marginalized adolescent readers are products of theoretical and policy concerns as much as they are the result of individual learning abilities.

The purpose of this review is to synthesize theory and research relevant to adolescents' experiences with reading instruction in the adolescent English language arts classroom. Given that classroom practice is always situated within a policy context, I also examine the role of policy in adolescent literacy learning. In this review, I draw on the research and theories of particular significance to struggling adolescent readers’ experiences to address the following questions:

- What theoretical paradigms are current influences on literacy instruction in the English language arts classroom?
- What do qualitative studies reveal about the reading habits and values of adolescent readers, and what inferences can we draw regarding the experiences of students who struggle with school reading in a general education context?
- How does reading policy address struggling adolescent readers?

I use the zoom metaphor to navigate between these areas of focus to gain an ever-widening perspective on the multiple forces shaping literacy learning for marginalized adolescent readers. The findings of this review are based on selected research, theory, and policy documents that provide a lens on adolescent literacy learning as an individual, socially constructed process.

Methods

The body of work discussed here encompasses a broad range of studies exploring adolescent readers, literacy learning theory, and policy, including both research studies and primary policy documents. I identified the literature included in this review through searches of ERIC, PsycINFO, Expanded Academic ASAP, and First Search. Additional materials were identified through Internet searches of the websites of policy and professional organizations and reviews of academic publishers’ catalogues. Terms used to search for relevant materials include “struggling adolescent readers,” “reading policy,” “adolescent read*,” “marginalized readers,” “high school read*,” “secondary read*,” “middle school read*,” “literacy policy,” and “reading policy.” I narrowed the results to include articles, scholarly books, and policy documents that met the following criteria:

- A central objective of the research was to gain knowledge of adolescent reading experiences in school settings and to gain knowledge of nonschool reading experiences that have implications for school learning; or a central objective of the research was to gain knowledge about the impact of policy on reading instruction for adolescents.
- The research offered a perspective on the individual nature of adolescent reading experiences.
- The research described adolescents' literacy learning experiences and included specific information about reading.
- The research was conducted in the United States.
- Literature exploring literacy learning theory was applicable to classroom practice.
Marginalized Adolescent Readers

- The policy documents were produced after the initial implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.
- The policy documents were published by entities active at a national level.

I also included selected policy-related documents and research addressing early literacy learning when they enhanced the discussion of adolescent literacy learning and policy.

Because this review is concerned primarily with examining adolescent reading instruction as a socially constructed process in the English language arts classroom, I did not include studies concerned primarily with reading processes rather than classroom learning experiences (e.g., Wolfe & Goldman, 2005) or research that studied reading difficulties in students with emotional, behavioral, or other special needs (Klingner & Vaughn, 1999). The literature that is foregrounded in this review is especially relevant in terms of illustrating the connections between theory, practice, and policy in the context of the English language arts classroom because, more than any other discipline, English language arts provides the foundation for reading skills and reading identity development. This review recognizes that the term "marginalized reader" is socially constructed.

Donna Alvermann (2001) observes, “Often our identities as readers are decided for us, as when others label us as avid readers, slow readers, mystery readers, and the like” (p. 676). All of these personas carry significant cultural meaning. Readers who are deemed less-than-proficient (for a host of reasons) have been variously labeled as “struggling” (Ash, 2002; Flammer, 2001; Ivey, 1999a; Williams, M. 2001), “remedial” (Wilhelm, 1997), “at-risk” (Fisher, 2001; Ruddell & Shearer, 2002), “reluctant” (Wilhelm, 1997), and “marginalized” (Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore, 2000). Literacy scholars point to the detrimental cultural baggage that accompanies labels such as “remedial” and “struggling” (Moje et al.). A more useful term for understanding this diverse group of readers is the notion of marginalization. Moje et al. describe marginalized readers as

those who are not connected to literacy in classrooms and schools. Specifically, we identify as marginalized adolescents those who are not engaged in the reading and writing done in school; who have language or cultural practices different than those valued in school; or who are outsiders to the dominant group because of their race, class, gender, or sexual orientation. (p. 405)

By casting readers as marginalized rather than remedial we reject an essentialist view of the individual and recognize that “identity is multiple, fragmentary, and contradictory” (McCarthey & Moje, 2002, p. 230). In general, research that explores marginalized adolescent readers falls into two categories: studies of instructional interventions (Alvermann, Hinckman, Moore, Phelps, & Waff, 1998; Boyd, 2002; Harmon, 2002; Moore & Aspegren, 2001; O’Brien, 1998; Rex, 2001; Taylor & Nesheim, 2000; Williams, M., 2001; Zigo, 1998) and case studies or ethnographies in which marginalized readers are only some of the participants framed in a larger study (Finders, 1997; Hynds, 1997; Ivey, 1999b; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Moje, 2000; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Wells, 1996; Wilhelm, 1997; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). For the purposes of this review, the term marginalized readers refers to students who have experienced difficulty with school-based reading for a variety of reasons. I use the term struggling reader interchangeably, with the recognition
that both terms are social constructions that carry implications for adolescents' positions in schools.

Zoom to Theory: Defining Reading in the Language Arts Classroom

One of the challenges inherent in developing policy that addresses struggling adolescent readers is the lack of consensus on what constitutes proficiency in reading and what constitutes best practice for promoting proficiency. This section explores the first of my research questions: What theoretical paradigms are current influences on literacy instruction in the English language arts classroom? Examining the conceptual models driving instruction enables us to see that what counts as reading has an impact on how we address the needs of marginalized adolescent readers. Three major paradigms surface in the literature on reading pedagogy in English language arts: reader response, strategic reading, and critical literacy. These models are not mutually exclusive, nor are they exhaustive. They do, however, represent dominant approaches to pedagogy that affect marginalized readers. Before discussing these approaches, it will be useful to review briefly how historical shifts in the definition of literacy continue to affect marginalized readers today.

Antecedents of Evolving Concepts of Literacy

It is important to note that, if there is to be a category such as “struggling reader,” there must be a category that reflects nonstruggling readers. (Alvermann, 2001, alludes to this fact.) The existence of either category, or of any categorization of literacy abilities, begs the questions “What is literacy?” and “How is reading constructed within literacy?” The answers to both questions depend entirely on the time and place under consideration. Stephen Kucer (2001) observes that an explosion of interest in literacy practices and instruction in recent decades has been marked by converging literacy-related disciplines. Kucer writes:

Disciplines as diverse as linguistics, cultural studies, and psychology have all come to view an understanding of the process of reading and writing as critical to their fields. Not surprisingly, there has been a tendency for each discipline to create literacy in its own image. Cognitive psychologists explore the mental processes that are used to generate meaning through and from print. Socioculturalists view acts of literacy as expressions of group identity that signal power relationships. Developmentalists focus on the strategies employed and the patterns displayed in the learning of reading and writing.’(p. 3).

Myers's (1996) chronology of English education details the shifting definitions of literacy that have influenced how reading is treated in formal education. According to Myers, American literacy has experienced four broad paradigm shifts: (a) from orality to signature literacy (1660 to 1776); (b) from signature to recitation literacy (from 1776 to 1864); (c) from recitation literacy to decoding/analytic literacy (1864 to 1916); and (d) from decoding/analytic literacy to critical/translation literacy (from 1916 to 1983). Although the phases are chronological, the values exhibited during a particular phase did not necessarily vanish with the onset of the next phase. In fact, Myers points out, it is possible to see remnants from each phase in current educational practice. These historical antecedents continue to affect definitions and discussions related to marginalized readers.
For example, Myers raises the possibility that some struggling readers may be displaying an "intuitive effort" to preserve their identity:

Literacy is not a neutral activity. It does change self-identity, family relations, and politics. Resistance to literacy may be for many students an intuitive effort to preserve culture, self, and family and is not then a simple matter of anti-intellectual or remedial behavior. It may be, from one point of view, a heroic defense of another form of literacy valued by one's family and community. (p. 35)

A consequence of the shift from face-to-face literacy to print that affects readers today is the loss of semantic and phonetic contexts that assist in interpretation. As a result, "literate readers and writers must re-create contexts of use, construct more and more inferences, and engage in acts of translation in which some meaning is always lost and some is always added" (Myers, 1996, p. 39). For marginalized readers, such slippage can be problematic (Flood & Lapp, 2000).

A remnant of the period of signature and recording literacy is the ranking of students by literacy ability through criteria embedded within the larger culture. The legacy of this is ever-present in the sorting mechanisms inherent in most assessment instruments. It is so embedded in our conception of literacy that it is perhaps difficult to conceive of reading without assuming that some are better at it than others and that it is the school's job to reduce that difference. Three practices that emerged from decoding/analytic literacy that affect today's struggling readers are (a) the notion of leveled texts, which match readers with "appropriate" reading material; (b) the emergence of New Criticism, which dictates a systematic and "correct" reading of text; and (c) the creation of national literacy tests which determine individuals' reading achievements and place them into groups accordingly.

One of the most enduring legacies of previous conceptions of literacy has to do with the identification of deficiencies in reading abilities. Early in the 20th century, adults who diagnosed reading difficulties in children correlated an inability to read with a deficit within the child, most often characterized as a cognitive or neurological disorder (Klenk & Kibby, 2000). This "medical model" of reading diagnosis was prevalent until mid-century, when instructional intervention models gained credence. The medical model did not go away, however. Aspects of it are apparent in the identification of special education/learning disabled students (Klenk & Kibby), whose reading difficulties generally are not addressed in the literature of English language arts education. The persistence of this notion is great, as, according to Adelman, Reyna, Collins, Onghai, and Taylor (1999), it is likely that any student not doing well in literacy learning will be diagnosed as having learning disabilities. Even the standards of what passes muster as quality medical research are championed today as appropriate for determining what counts as quality literacy research (Lyon, Shaywitz, Shaywitz, & Chhabra, 2005). The medical model continues to affect marginalized readers: The specific focus of government funding for adolescent reading, available through the Partnership for Reading, is the "discovery of cognitive, perceptual, behavioral, genetic, and neurobiological mechanisms" that affect adolescent literacy learning and the "identification, prevention, and remediation of reading and writing disabilities in adolescents" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., p. 1). Although detailed analysis of the literature on reading disabilities is beyond the scope of this review, it is important to recognize the ongoing influence
of the medical model in contemporary pedagogy. It is expressed in what Alvermann (2001) calls the "deprivation approach" of identifying marginalized readers. The deprivation model assumes that adolescents fall into distinctive categories of cognitive processing ability as measured by formal and informal assessments. Students who perform poorly on reading tasks are assumed to have not yet developed the necessary skills for functioning at a particular grade or level. Some of these students are formally identified as in need of intervention or remediation. There are also secondary students who are not formally identified as having learning disabilities but for whom school reading is a challenging proposition. The needs of these marginalized readers are largely overlooked in current English language arts curricula and pedagogy. Examining current models of instruction in English language arts allows us to see the benefits and limits of approaches for marginalized readers.

**Reader Response Approaches to Reading**

First articulated by I. A. Richards (1929) and Louise Rosenblatt (1938), reader response theory holds that meaning is made through the reader's transaction with the text. Rosenblatt (1978) describes what happens when we read:

The reader's attention to the text activates certain elements in his past experience—external reference, internal response—that have become linked with the verbal symbols. Meaning will emerge from a network of relationships among the things symbolized as he senses them. (p. 11)

Reader response theory emphasizes that meaning is created through a process rather than extracted as a "correct" interpretation which resides in the text. Rosenblatt (1978) differentiates between two types of responses, or stances, that readers adopt in approaching text: aesthetic, in which the reader's attention is directed to experiencing or living through the textual world, and efferent, in which the reader's attention is directed to carrying away specific information from the text. Rosenblatt's legacy in the secondary English classroom is largely felt in the area of aesthetic response, where teachers make use of students' personal responses to literary works (Marshall, 2000). Rosenblatt articulates her understanding that the reader must be active to achieve meaning, "The reader's creation of a poem out of a text must be an active, self-ordering and self-corrective process" (p. 11). The previously discussed studies of adolescent readers suggest that the self-corrective aspect of reading is potentially problematic for marginalized readers because they lack familiarity with, or resist taking, a readerly stance that is compatible with how reading is approached in schools. Wilhelm (1997) suggests that some readers may need assistance in experiencing a meaningful response and identifies ten dimensions of reader response that he found helpful to the marginalized readers in his class. When teachers make visible the strategies that engaged readers use, Wilhelm believes the less engaged readers can model their reading behavior to meet with greater success.

A significant benefit of reader response theory for marginalized readers is that it values individual reader's schema and interpretation and rejects the notion that there is only one valid way to read a work. The continuing dominance of the literary canon (Applebee, 1993; Jago, 2000) means that, in many classrooms, struggling readers will encounter texts that are potentially problematic because of their content and structure. If these readers are encouraged to develop personal responses to such literary works, they may exhibit increased engagement and motivation.
Another potential advantage of using reader response approaches with struggling readers is that it could open avenues for allowing students to read beyond traditional texts.

Lewis (2000) contends that too often educators have conflated personal response with aesthetic reading, stripping the transaction of interpretive and critical possibilities. She observes that “a growing number of English educators take issue with reader-response theory, noting that it fails to acknowledge the sociocultural construction of textual interpretation and evaluation” (p. 121). Lewis advocates for a broader view of aesthetic reading, one that acknowledges the social and political implications of the reading act and recognizes that “response” is always culturally situated.

Another limitation of reader response theory for marginalized readers is that it hinges on reading literary or fictional works. When curriculum is fiction-centric, it runs the risk of reduced relevance to contemporary youth. Struggling readers need exposure to a variety of reading modes. Particularly in high school, students are faced with English classes that emphasize literary analysis and subject area classes that emphasize content. Thus students’ reading experiences are fairly narrow. This may not affect prolific readers who read with confidence outside school, but it likely contributes to the marginalized readers’ disengagement with the act of reading.

Strategic Reading in the Secondary Classroom

If reader response pedagogy is largely about the text being read, strategy-based pedagogy is about the approach a reader adopts for the text. Reading researchers and theorists have largely moved away from a model of reading as a set of technical skills that can be acquired through methodological application of pedagogy. Yet statewide reading tests that interpret reading behaviors in terms of leveled achievement carry significant currency. Thus “sure-fire” approaches to improving the performance of struggling readers may be appealing to those whose feet are held close to the accountability flames: Miller’s (2003) handbook Survival Reading Skills for Secondary Students is illustrative of “practical, time-saving” (which often implies decontextualized) strategies for teachers to use with struggling adolescent readers. Beginning with sight word identification and moving through phonics to word structure and on to context clues, the information, worksheets, and theory in this volume point to a view of reading as a skill that can be acquired through disciplined instruction and practice. Miller states that her book is unique because it fills a void in professional textbooks geared to Grades 5–12. The absence of professional textbooks is a result of shifting conceptions of reading; in that the field as a whole has moved toward integrated, socially situated views of reading. Yet that Miller’s book was recently published is indicative of a growing niche for teachers, staff developers, and administrators looking to improve the performance of struggling adolescent readers. McEwan’s Raising Reading Achievement in Middle and High Schools (2001) speaks specifically to principals. The author cautions that improving reading is a difficult endeavor with no quick fix to be had. She acknowledges that there are many paths to advancing students’ literacy learning and that the best course of action for any particular school must be identified by the context of the setting. The range of possible moves to enhance reading suggested by McEwan is not as open as she indicates, however. What it comes down to is “the critical importance of teaching decoding, developing fluency, and increasing the use of cognitive strategies to raise
Franzak reading achievement” (p. 65). A less useful practice, she argues, is free reading or independent reading:

Middle and high school students who do not have these prerequisite skills would be better served to spend their instructional time with skilled teachers acquiring skills and strategies and then practicing in reading materials geared toward their specific reading levels far away from the prying eyes of the peers. Staring at just any printed page during SSR will not transform low-achievers into high-achieving readers. Very-low-achieving readers will only make gains in achievement if they spend their time with proven programs. (pp. 65-66)

This view of appropriate pedagogy for struggling readers is gaining momentum, as Greenleaf, Jiménez, and Roller (2002) suggest, citing the example of the move in California to identify struggling readers on the basis of test scores and then place them in remedial reading courses where programmed interventions belie the complex nature of adolescents’ real struggles with school literacy achievement.

The underlying premise of this approach is that readers who struggle are not knowledgeable about the reading strategies employed by expert or accomplished readers. Comprehension requires readers to employ a range of strategies as they interact with text (Flood & Lapp, 2000). This idea is certainly not new, as a number of researchers have contributed to our understanding of the role that comprehension plays in reading (Palincsar & Brown, 1986; Pressley, 2001, 2000). But as researchers have illuminated effective pedagogical practice for improving reading comprehension, that knowledge has not been extensively adopted in classroom practice (Pressley, 2001). This may be especially true in secondary school, where English teachers tend to believe their job is to teach literature (Ericson, 2001) and where other content area teachers believe their primary responsibility is to teach content, not strategies for accessing content (Holloway, 1999). Another factor contributing to the difficulty of translating research into classroom practice may be that reading comprehension means different things to different people, even within the literacy research community (Anders, 2002): A current approach to teaching comprehension is to describe what “good readers” do to understand text and to explicitly teach those strategies to struggling readers (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Flood & Lapp, 2000; Pressley, 2000; Schoenbach, Greenleaf, Cziko, & Hurwitz, 1999; Wilhelm, 1997). Syntheses of such strategies vary, but most reflect constructivist principles that allow readers to take ownership of the reading process. In their review of comprehension instruction research, Flood and Lapp identify seven practices that are effective in facilitating comprehension for struggling readers:

(1) preparing for reading practices, (2) reciprocal teaching practices, (3) understanding and using knowledge of text structure practices, (4) questioning practices, (5) information processing practices, (6) summarizing practices, and (7) voluntary/recreational reading practices. (pp. 140–141)

A number of current, popular pedagogical texts reflect a strategic reading approach. For example, Robb’s (2000) Teaching Reading in the Middle School presents a hybrid that combines a reading workshop (thereby meeting the need for choice) with focused instruction on reading strategies. Van Horn (2001) likewise proposes an approach that draws on reader-response theory (in emphasizing transaction with
Marginalized Adolescent Readers

text) and metacognitive theory (in inviting students to think about reading per se). Tovani's (2000) *I Read It, but I Don't Get It* also promotes a strategic approach to reading and offers a number of exercises and methods that explicitly ask students to engage in strategic reading. Major textbook publishers are also subscribing to the metacognitive reading strategy trend with books like Kylene Beers's *Reading Skills and Strategies: Reaching Reluctant Readers* (2000), published by Holt, Rinehart and Winston as part of its Elements of Literature series. Because a strategic-metacognitive model is a rather recent development, it remains to be seen whether such teaching approaches will alter the experiences of struggling adolescent readers in positive and productive ways. Lacking critical attention to the ways in which reading and textual representations marginalize some populations (including struggling readers), strategic-metacognitive approaches do not ask students to fully investigate what it means to be a reader. Emphasizing reading strategies may also have the unintended consequence of diminishing engagement. Guthrie and Alvermann (1999) and Guthrie and Anderson (1999) suggest that proficient readers are engaged readers. It is possible that asking marginalized readers to shift their focus from the text to the mental activity involved in reading can become a distraction that interferes with their ability to engage with the text. While the field is witnessing an expansion of strategy-based pedagogy, Anders (2002) points out the need to investigate further how to help students adopt strategies across contexts. Research has also recognized that comprehension is context specific and that inherent in any skilled reader's comprehension of text is attention to the sociocultural context of the reading act.

One way of applying this understanding in practice is to teach students about the nature of textual discourse. This approach focuses on specific academic discourses and asks students to consider both cognitive and sociocultural aspects of reading. An example of this is the Reading Apprenticeship framework developed by Cynthia Greenleaf and Ruth Schoenbach in conjunction with teachers and researchers in the Strategic Literacy Initiative of WestEd (Jordan & Schoenbach, 2003). The Reading Apprenticeship framework views marginalized adolescent readers as inexperienced readers, not beginning readers. As such, marginalized readers need practice and support in reading a range of materials for a variety of purposes. This approach recognizes the value-laden nature of academic discourses and shows students how to participate in them with a critical perspective. Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, and Mueller (2001) cite the views of literacy researchers such as Lisa Delpit (1995) who argue that teachers need to make explicit the literacy codes at work in academic literacy. Greenleaf et al. write:

> Our own work with students from richly different backgrounds has underscored the necessity of not only telling students what to do and providing engaging and authentic opportunities for them to do it, but also painstakingly and explicitly showing them how, building bridges from their cultural knowledge and language experiences to the language and literacy practices valued and measured in school and society. (p. 88)

By building bridges between background knowledge and school literacy practices, the Reading Apprenticeship model takes into account concerns raised by Au (2000) and others regarding expectations and support for marginalized students. Au writes, "There should not be a different set of standards for students of diverse backgrounds,
but there should be a recognition that these students may require more powerful
instruction and additional time to meet the standards" (p. 844).

Critical Pedagogy and the Struggling Reader

Reader response and strategic reading both offer potential benefits and drawbacks
for marginalized adolescent readers. A third theoretical model in literacy education
is critical literacy. According to Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002), critical
literacy in the English classroom can be analyzed into the following four dimensions:
(a) disrupting the commonplace, (b) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (c) focusing
on sociopolitical issues, and (d) taking action and promoting social justice. Reading,
from a critical literacy perspective, involves not just the text and one's transaction
with it, but framing that transaction in a larger sociopolitical context. In so doing,
one is reading the word and the world, as Freire and Macedo (1987) explain. "To
sum up," Freire writes, "reading always involves critical perception, interpretation,
and rewriting of what is read" (p. 36). The term critical literacy has generated a
wide range of perspectives that problematize literacy practices (Luke & Freebody,
1997), and there is no single version of what critical literacy should and could look
like in secondary-level reading instruction. In general, however, critical literacy
adherents recognize that literacies are a constellation of social practices framed by
institutional contexts. As Luke and Freebody explain:

To say that literacy is socially constructed, then, is also to say that it is institutionally
located. Our position is that institutional context is not benign or neutral, but rather must be seen as informed by social contracts and historical
projects for molding, making, and disciplining human subjects, populaces,
and communities and for shaping and distributing cultural and material
resources. (p. 3)

Critical literacy theorists view economic, social, and educational practice as
inextricably linked; therefore, "literacy" can be understood only in relation to how
it privileges some groups over others. Giroux (1992) writes that what is missing
from "traditional" views of literacy as cognitive activity that pupils learn through
a transmission model is...

any notion of how teachers both produce and authorize particular forms of
political, ethical, and social literacy. Also missing from this dominant posi-
tion is any sense of how the ideologies that inform teacher authority, with its
particular view of knowledge and curriculum on the one hand and pedagogy
on the other, serves to legitimate and introduce students to particular ways of
life, and their corresponding narratives and cultural values. In both cases, the
emphasis on mastery, procedure, and certainty functions to exclude the voices,
histories, and experience of subordinate groups from the ideologies, practices,
and normative orderings that constitute the symbolic hierarchies of the dom-
inant English curriculum. (p. 304)

Little room is left in Giroux's comments for school literacy that would promote
equity. If, as suggested by Giroux, all school literacy is essentially colonizing,
teachers and students are situated as reproducers of unequal and dominant social
structures. It is this arrangement that critical literacy seeks to work against. Rejecting
the essentializing nature of Giroux's assessment of school literacy, other theorists
have argued that it is possible to construct literacy education in ways that promote
Marginalized Adolescent Readers

social justice (Beach & Myers, 2001; Lee, 1995; Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003; Powell, 1999). Critical literacy theorist Carole Edelsky (1996) differentiates between literacy, writing, and reading and sets up further distinctions between reading and not-reading, exercises and nonexercises, and literates-as-Subjects and literates-as-Objects. The distinctions are important, she argues, because without such distinctions, it is impossible to push forward a new model of literacy that would challenge inequalities. Binaries inherently present opposition, a possession and lack, as it were. Binary frames are all too frequently employed in describing literacies; and although Edelsky’s distinctions enable us to recognize categories that might otherwise remain obscured, such distinctions also fix identity categories. This is especially evident when we speak of proficient and struggling readers, categories that reify context-specific distinctions. When we speak of marginalized or struggling readers, we generalize about the students when it is quite possible that the reading behavior is directly tied to the school-context.

A number of theorists have addressed how the social institution of schools supports a particular academic-literacy that is often in conflict with home or nonschool literacies (Gallego & Hollingsworth, 2000; Gee, 1996). O’Brien (1998) describes the activities of school literacy:

Students read textbooks and answer questions at the ends of chapters; they write themed reports and fill out worksheets. Officially, reading and writing are viewed as either school subjects (e.g., developmental reading; remedial or corrective reading) or learning tools (e.g., comprehension strategies, study strategies) whose form and function are defined by teachers, curriculum directors, school boards, and administrators. Schooled literacy is both a tool for learning content and an artifact of the broader school culture. (p. 28)

Because marginalized adolescent readers are initially identified as such within the school context, the underlying structure and values of school literacy are built into definitions of struggling readers. However, an important distinction needs to be made regarding authentic academic literacies, which promote student initiation into literacy discourses particular to academic disciplines, and the decontextualized school literacy practices that O’Brien describes. O’Brien summarizes practices that are lacking in meaning for students because they are not reflective of authentic discursive practices. Academic literacies that are additive are ones that initiate students into ways of reading, writing, and thinking like a geographer, a poet, a historian, or a journalist, for example. They teach students how to navigate the particular features of texts situated within the tradition they are studying. Thus high school students might read traditional works in the English classroom, but they would do so in a framework that questions how the text is constructed both technically and socially. Ideally, additive academic literacies problematize the concept of the discourse itself to explore how certain discourses have perpetuated discriminatory modes of thinking and behavior. Such is the promise of critical literacy, though widespread adoption in classrooms has yet to occur, so it is difficult to assess the effect this pedagogy might have.

Another development in the theoretical literature about adolescent literacy learning is the proposition that the divide between in- and out-of-school literacy practices is a false dichotomy: Critical scholars interested in adolescents’ indigenous literacies propose that we would be better off to conceptualize literacies as fluid actions and
identities that individuals use in myriad situations (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Hinchman, Payne-Bourcy, Thomas, & Olcott, 2002). Just as the dichotomy between in-school and out-of-school literacy is a false one in this view, it is important to question the potential implications of critical literacy pedagogy for struggling adolescent readers. Educators committed to social change and equitable social arrangements are drawn to critical literacy for its transformative potential. In Powell’s (1999) words,

> An emancipatory literacy releases us from the bondage of disillusionment, inciting us to challenge the immobilizing forces of inertia that surround us and pursue new avenues for resistance. It is a literacy that legitimizes all voices, that affirms students’ languages, and that penetrates the invisibility of hegemony. (p. 98)

James Gee (2001b) argues that “reading and writing cannot be separated from speaking, listening, and interacting, on the one hand, or using language to think about and act on the world, on the other” (p. 714). Hagood (2002) observes:

> What is central to critical literacy that focuses on identity is the influence of the text and specifically of identities in texts on the reader. The text, imbued with societal and cultural structures of race, class, and gender, marks the site of the struggle for power, knowledge, and representation. (pp. 250–251)

This is especially relevant for secondary literacy educators, because the English language arts curriculum is text-driven and fiction-centric. Hagood (2002) goes on to point out that a common but incomplete view of the influence of text is that through encountering popular texts, students are inscribed with normative, hegemonic images that perpetuate inequality. As Hagood illustrates, adolescents do not necessarily accept and reinscribe readings in the way adults might expect. She argues:

> Critical literacy might fare better with instruction that examines the complex interrelations of formations of the self... in order to grasp better how readers like Timony [a participant in Hagood’s research] get produced and objectified in identities and how they construct new ways of being as they position themselves as text. (p. 260)

As texts produce readers, so too does literacy theory produce readers, including the identity of readers who do not share proficiency in culturally sanctioned reading practices. One wonders if a struggling reader in a critical literacy paradigm becomes the student who reads against the grain of equity-minded education, the student who adopts views congruent with current social arrangements. It is certainly possible, as Myers’s (1996) analysis demonstrates, that with each shift in what it means to read proficiently, an accompanying, if implicit, definition of what it means to not read proficiently jeopardizes the success of some students.

In summary, theoretical models show a range of possible approaches for teaching reading in the English language arts classroom with the aim of improving the achievement of marginalized readers. In designing instruction for marginalized readers, it is important to recognize the political and social values embedded within different models and conceptions of reading. Teachers may believe they are simply teaching reading and ignore political and social dimensions of the act. However, to serve students who have not experienced success with school reading, it is
important to identify the values inherent in curricula. Approaches that call for a technical-scientific method will likely not result in long-lasting improvement because they fail to recognize the roles of cultural and individual agency in literacy learning. Metacognitive approaches may be useful in teaching students the hows and whys of reading in disciplinary discourses, but, because they fall short of problematizing social arrangements, they hold potential for continuing the alienation of marginalized students. Critical pedagogy that incorporates effective literacy instruction seems to hold the most potential for both improving reading achievement and working toward equitable social arrangements.

**Zoom to Research: Exploring Struggling Adolescent Readers**

The theoretical models reviewed in the previous section offer insight into how reading is constructed. To understand policy and practice for marginalized adolescent readers, theory needs to be connected to the lived experiences of adolescent readers. Thus, in this section, I explore my second research question: *What do qualitative studies reveal about the reading habits and values of adolescent readers, and what inferences can we draw regarding the experiences of students who struggle with school reading in a general education context?* I widen the focus from theory to review studies of the experiences of adolescent readers, and I highlight findings that have implications for readers who have been labeled as less proficient than their peers in reading skills and behaviors. This body of literature adds depth to our understanding of adolescent readers in general but, most important, illuminates habits and values of adolescent readers who struggle with text in school settings and identifies factors that teachers and policymakers should take into account when designing instruction for marginalized adolescent readers.

The sociocultural paradigm has a significant presence in current literacy studies and sheds light on how social context is treated as an individual and integral part of literacy learning. Thus, in this review, I look at commonalities across sociocultural categories to identify habits and values that marginalized adolescent readers seem to share. I then discuss the implications of these findings for classroom practice as a prelude to exploring the role of policy in adolescent literacy learning.

**Sociocultural Perspectives on Reading: The New Literacy Studies**

As discussed earlier, sociocultural perspectives on literacy, sometimes referred to as “the New Literacy Studies” (Gee, 2000, p. 412), hold that reading is not a stand-alone practice, but rather one embedded in socially situated identity and activity. Scholars working from this tradition cast literacy and reading activities as specific to Discourse communities (Gee, 1996) within class, gender, race, and other social identity categories.

With the recognition that reading is a culturally situated activity (Barton, 1994; Gee, 1996; Street, 1995) and that “even ‘taste’ is never a truly personal thing but a carefully inculcated norm” (Scholes, 1985, p. 24), sociocultural literacy researchers seek to understand the contextually bound experiences of adolescent readers. As Cherland (1994) observes, “Every person is part of a culture, part of a society, and . . . each person participates in cultural norms that determine how they act as readers” (p. 6). In these studies, a particular social context is often foregrounded to illuminate the specific characteristics of reading and literacy for those group members.
Researchers attending to the intersections of race and literacy identity examine how culture permeates reading behavior. Writing about her son's "struggle of literary personhood," Willis (1995) underscores the culturally specific literacy legacy of her home: "We select our artwork, magazines, novels, television programs, music, videos, and movies to reflect interests in African American life and society" (p. 44). Thus racial consciousness helps to shape her son's literacy identity. Recent inquiries into cultural frameworks (Lee, 1995; Lee, Spencer, & Harpalani, 2003) speak to the need for situated literacy instruction that specifically addresses the everyday experiences of African American students to develop academic literacies while communicating in ways that are culturally familiar (Lee et al., 2003).

Tatum's (2000) study of disenfranchised African American readers demonstrates that racial experiences are highly relevant to their reading lives. "Students blamed derogatory remarks from previous teachers as powerful deterrents to reading," he explains (p. 55). One of his participants says, "We are not used to reading and writing. It's like we are starting over in eighth grade" (p. 55). Tatum cites comprehension and strategy difficulties that affected the students' reading abilities, as well as fear of embarrassment, which prevented the students from academic risk taking. One way of looking at these students' experiences considers them in light of the split between school and nonschool literacies. For some ethnic and racial groups, the literacies that constitute their cultural practice are not valued in school (Heath, 1983). Noll (1998), for example, documents the rich literacies of Lakota and Dakota American Indian youth, literacies that are intimately linked with their ethnic and racial identity. She alerts us to the tendency for teachers to misjudge students' capabilities as a result of judging students by dominant culture standards. Any misjudgment or underestimation of students' capabilities is distressing, given the likelihood of lower expectations that may result. In the case of African American youth and other students of color, such misjudgment is particularly worrisome with respect to the differing economic outcomes accompanying what is widely called the "Achievement Gap" between students of color and European American students. Evolving understandings of literacy as a sociocultural practice have certainly challenged dominant conceptions of literacy achievement, but as Tatum's (2000) and Lee's (1995) work reminds us, marginalized groups, Black males in particular, continue to suffer because of inadequate and misguided literacy education. There continues to be a need for research that investigates the literacy learning of other marginalized adolescent populations, including Native American students and economically disadvantaged rural students. While urban education researchers have brought much-needed attention to large populations of students placed at risk because of counter-productive educational practices, the needs of smaller populations of marginalized youth have largely gone unaddressed.

Studies such as Tatum's demonstrate that one struggling reader is not every struggling reader. Gendered studies of adolescent readers have also contributed to our understanding of how "one-size" literacy does not fit all. Finders (1997) studied the literacy experiences of two different but both academically successful groups of girls. She found, as with the boys studied by Smith and Wilhelm (2002) that social contact with peers was extremely important in adolescent literacy development. Cherland's (1994) study of Canadian girls' fiction reading demonstrates the highly gendered nature of reading, maintaining that in the
community investigated, “reading was a feminine activity, and the Oak Town children knew this” (p. 89). She further argues that such reading practices not only define and shape ideas about literacy but also are powerful influences in the construction of gender.

Similarly, Young (2001) explored how male readers construct masculinity, concluding that their reading of cultural images depends on the context in which the reading activity occurs. Young and Brozo’s (2001) edited e-mail correspondence provides a window into the field’s differing views on the most appropriate way of meeting the needs of male readers while also challenging the social structures that contribute to gendered literacy identities. Smith and Wilhelm (2002) offer a detailed exploration of young men’s literacy lives and surface a number of interesting observations that challenge our assumptions about gender and reading: They found that their participants were not resistant to reading per se but did exhibit preferences for shorter texts, works without ambiguous endings, and texts that contributed to their feelings of competence and control.

Researchers concerned with the connection between literacy and gender acknowledge that gender is but one of several important identity constructs that influence reading. Hinchman, Payne-Bourcy, Thomas, and Olcott’s (2002) study of three White male adolescents’ literacies examines converging memberships of race, class, and gender. Documenting the complexities of the boys’ literacies, they conclude that the participants did not act in expected hegemonic ways and that they all experienced a degree of discomfort in certain settings. The authors advise researchers against developing essentialist conclusions about gender, race, and class. Indeed, the complexities of the literacy experiences documented by Hinchman et al. (2002), Smith and Wilhelm (2002), and Ivey (1999a, 1999b) reinforce what Beach (1993) describes as a limitation of cultural perspectives on reader response: “Given differences in . . . purposes, needs, expectations, or social context, the same reader may apply quite different formations” (p. 151).

Beach’s caution to recognize the individuality of every reader does not diminish the need for every reader to have a meaningful model that he or she can respect and emulate. In discussing why some children seem to join “the literacy club” with ease, Frank Smith (1988) maintains, “Children do so because they can see others engaging profitably in literacy activities who are the kind of people the children see themselves as being. Admission is once again a mutual act of acceptance. There is no exclusion” (p. 10). The key phrase here is who are the kind of people the children see themselves as being. Marginalized readers need models of reading that value their identities and provide a means of addressing the multiple influences that affect their reading experiences (Moje et al., 2000).

Adolescent Literacy Beyond Classroom Walls

It is significant, as Vogel and Zancanella (1991) make us aware, that “just the fact that students have many literary experiences outside of school makes literature unlike other school subjects” (p. 54). Given the vast resources that many adolescents possess in their voluntary literacy learning, a promising development in literacy theory and instruction is the growing recognition that adolescents have multiple literacies that span their social worlds both in and out of school (Hinchman, Alvermann, Boyd, Brozo, & Vacca, 2003; Hinchman, Payne-Bourcy, Thomas, & Olcott, 2002; Hull & Schultz, 2001; Moje, 2002). It is in this space, where teachers
Franzak

foster students' critical awareness of their own literacies and link them to school-based practices, that we have the best chance of engaging students who resist response-based pedagogy.

Research shows that some texts that students prefer are typically not valued in schools. Moje (2002, 2000; Moje et al., 2000) writes extensively about the need to broaden our understanding of adolescents' literacies to more accurately reflect students' knowledge, interests, and abilities, which extend far beyond school-sanctioned literacy practices. If current instructional practices offer only a cursory acknowledgement of indigenous youth literacy practices—as, for example, in poetry lessons that include song lyrics—we shortchange students' literacy knowledge and fail to capitalize on the possibility of bridging and blending school and nonschool literacies. Drawing on Moll's (Moll, 1994; Moll & Greenberg, 1990) concept of "funds of knowledge," Moje (2000) demonstrates how a student who struggles in the school context can have a fluent, active, and valued literacy life outside of school. Two principles of funds of knowledge are that they are activity based and they are acquired as a result of desire and purpose. Although educators recognize reading as an active process, for marginalized readers the activity in reading often is not readily apparent, as discussed earlier. In contrast, literacy experiences embedded in their funds of knowledge, which are largely employed outside the official school context, are easily identifiable as active and purposeful. For literacy educators, a key question becomes how to foster authentic school-based reading activities that recognize and extend the literacy values that marginalized readers bring into the classroom.

Multitextuality in Adolescent Lives

Mayher (2001) points out a host of competing story modes that vie for adolescent attention:

The need for narrative has not disappeared, but the competition for reading as a source of story has become much more intense. Television is in color, not black and white, and there are a hundred or more channels available to virtually every adolescent in the United States.... An additional range of entertainment options comes with the computer and the Internet for those able to avail themselves of them. The new millennium is awash in a kid culture the likes of which the world has never seen. (p. x)

With many competing narrative sources, it is important for teachers and students to recognize the unique demands of textual forms. As McLuhan (1964) suggested, the medium merits critical exploration, as does the message it conveys. Until recently, the medium itself has received more attention in school literacy studies than the narratives embodied in the medium (Roberts, 1993; Williams, B., 2003). Recognizing burgeoning literacies, researchers and theorists suggest that effective instruction would take into account how popular text and nonprint literacies construct multiple positions that viewers and readers inhabit (Alvermann & Hagood, 2000; Alvermann, Hagood, & Williams, 2001; Hagood, 2001; Williams, B., 2003; Zancanella, Hall, & Pence, 2000). Reading a movie text is not the same as reading a printed novel; each demands a distinct set of discursive practices and engagement. Although the Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy has provided a venue for a number of articles illustrating critical media practices in the
secondary classroom (e.g., Fisherkeller, 2000; Morrell, 2002; Paul, 2000; Stevens, 2001), we have yet to see ethnographic research that investigates how critical media pedagogy would enhance the reading lives of adolescents who struggle with school literacy. A combination of logic and conviction can lead to an optimistic assessment of the potential for critical media literacy to improve marginalized adolescent readers’ experiences with text in and out of school. Until we have more detailed and comprehensive empirical studies, however, the impact of critical media literacy on struggling adolescent readers remains more of a question than an answer.

Kathy G. Short and Gloria Kauffman (2000) explain that humans make and share meaning through the use of various sign systems, which extend beyond printed text to include art, music, and oral and mathematical languages. All students, they argue, possess the potential to communicate effectively through the use of multiple sign systems, though access to and familiarity with sign systems is determined by a number of factors. In navigating between multiple sign systems, individuals take understandings created in one sign system and transpose them into another, a process that Short and Kauffman call transmediation. Traditional transmediation in the English classroom encompasses student-written responses to texts that they have read. Such a limited view, however, fails to recognize the multiple textual worlds or sign systems that teenagers negotiate every day.

Although much of the scholarship in this area falls under the purview of media studies, it has implications for English studies as it pushes on traditional notions of text. Fisherkeller (1997), for example, explores how three adolescents “read” popular television programs for identity constructs. Lewis (1998) describes several boys discussing horror films, noting their active role in constructing meaning. She concludes, “The meaning of a popular text is shaped, in part, by who is using it, the context in which it is being used, and the purposes it serves” (paragraph 15, electronic version).

Social Relations in Schooling

While social identity constructs obviously have great bearing on adolescent readers’ experiences, a theme that appears to run across gender, race, and class subjectivities is the need teens have for caring social relationships that mentor them in literacy practices (Hynds, 1997; Ivey, 1999a; Moje, 2000; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Positive relationships that affect literacy development are not confined to teacher-student interactions but also include peer and whole-class relationships. Rex (2001) argues that social support from a teacher and peers in a high-status English class provided the structure for a “general” reader to become a “gifted and talented” reader (p. 310).

To summarize, researchers using naturalistic inquiry have approached studies of adolescent readers from a variety of perspectives. Interview-based studies show adolescents sharing some reading preferences. Choice and purpose are important factors in motivation, and relationships with peers and teachers help students to acquire the “identity kit” (Gee, 1996) of a school reader. Sociocultural perspectives situate adolescent reading behaviors in cultural contexts and consider the influences of race, class, gender, and other identity factors. Studies of the contextually bound nature of literacy development have also pointed to the difference between the values accorded to school and nonschool literacies.
Commonalities Across Categories:
What Adolescents Tell Us About Literacy Learning

The terms used to refer to adolescents who have a problematic relationship with school reading are multiple and hued with values. An assumption of this analysis is that the experiences of the adolescents themselves are diverse and particular to individuals. That assumption does not negate the worth of recognizing patterns, however. Across studies of adolescent readers, repeated themes emerge which characterize this group of literacy learners. Of particular significance is the tendency for marginalized adolescent readers to read submissively (Smith, M., 1992). Such readers accord the text authority and expect to receive meaning from the text rather than in a transaction with the text (Rosenblatt, 1978). In an action research study in which he employed dramatic techniques to help readers connect with the text, Wilhelm (1997) found that struggling readers may not have an integrated view of reading and text and therefore attend primarily to surface features. This contention—that some readers experience difficulty because they are unable to experience the textual whole—is supported by other research, including Wilhelm’s work with Smith (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Similarly, in her case study of middle school readers, Hynds (1997) suggests that teachers need to help students unlearn part-to-whole strategies, which limit a reader’s conception of the textual world. Enciso’s (1997) study documents a diverse range of strategies used by one reader to enter a textual story world.

The problem of how to engage with text may indeed be significant for marginalized adolescent readers, in part because they do not readily adopt a reading stance congruent with school expectations. Hynds (1997) describes how some struggling readers search for correct answers, a behavior that is allied with the belief that meaning in reading is derived from external sources, not from internal mechanisms of the reader. This view suggests that, for struggling readers, even approaching the task of reading is fraught with potential for frustration. Marginal readers not only have difficulty entering the story world but often—as Smith and Wilhelm (2002) found in the case of male adolescent readers—have little sense of the efficacy of their reading. They lack critical standards of their own, assuming that the teacher will tell them how well they read through the assignment of a grade. This lack of an internal perspective on one’s reading identity is perhaps the most pernicious fallout from reading instructional practices that rely on teacher as interpreter rather than teacher as guide. Several case studies offer views into teaching practices that favor a more constructivist approach, such as Manning’s (2000) description of a highly successful urban middle school teacher and DaLie’s (2001) report on the use of literature circles in her high school English classes as a means to foster “real reading.” These cases examine response pedagogy in action, but we have yet to adequately explore whether and how marginalized adolescent readers experience a shift in orientation to reading and text as a result of student-centered or process-centered pedagogy.

One aspect of adolescent reading performance seems clear: the importance of purpose in reading activity (Broughton & Fairbanks, 2003; Hynds, 1997; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002). Having transitioned from a “progressive” middle school to a “traditional” high school where the English curriculum included worksheets, students in Wells’s (1996) study clearly differentiated between their earlier work, which was meaningful, and their later work, which was not. The students reported a
Marginalized Adolescent Readers

sense of dissatisfaction with their literacy learning during ninth grade. The importance of purpose in literacy learning cannot be understated; the remaining question is how to help marginalized readers find authentic purpose in school literacy learning—something that experience may have taught them is improbable. Gaughan (2001) suggests that if students begin with authentic questions about their own identity, they will participate in literacy learning that is both motivating and meaningful. However, Moje (2000) points out that marginalized readers may resist engaging in literacy learning that involves self-revelation and exploration if they have previously experienced a devaluing of their identities: “If students believe, for whatever reason, that they cannot write, talk, or read about their actual experiences, then the pedagogy is not really doing what it is supposed to do” (p. 43). Many literacy educators emphasize the importance of knowing students as individuals and offer a range of methods to do so from reading surveys (Atwell, 1998; Burke, 2000) to building curricula around student inquiry (Beach & Myers, 2001; Rief, 1999). Ideally, then, adolescent readers can develop their reading repertoire in a way that validates their identity rather than supplanting it with a limited view of school literacy. This would be an encouraging development, with promise for alleviating the situation that Ivey (1999b) describes, noting that the very students who most need to find purpose are those who are denied it through instructional practices.

Moje (2000) reports that struggling seventh graders lacked purpose in their reading and felt their grades “didn’t count” until high school (p. 79). Recognizing agency is key to understanding literacy development, Moore and Cunningham (1998) argue. “During life in general and literacy learning in particular,” they write, “adolescents act as agents, facing choices, making decisions, and realizing consequences” (p. 283). Furthermore, they posit, “Instructional efforts that promote skill and ignore will can be counterproductive” (p. 297). Descriptive studies of adolescent readers note that from a student perspective, there is a profound lack of choice when it comes to literacy learning and little opportunity to express will. Thus, acknowledging one’s agency as a learner may be a challenge, given the relatively few pedagogical choices adolescent readers make in the school context.

The power, or lack thereof, to self-select reading material has long been championed by reading workshop proponents such as Atwell (1998). Teachers who promote student choice of reading material through a reading-workshop approach report increases in marginalized readers’ ability and motivation (Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Taylor & Nesheim, 2000; Williams, M., 2001). A large-scale study of middle school readers conducted by Ivey and Broaddus (2001) indicated that choice and availability of desirable reading material were prime motivational factors influencing the students’ reading. When given the opportunity to select their own reading material, adolescents in a number of studies indicate a preference for texts that exhibit features not necessarily found in classrooms (Ivey, 1999a; Ivey & Broaddus; Hynds, 1997; Morris, Ervin, & Conrad, 2000; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999). Worthy, Moorman, and Turner found that the print materials preferred by reluctant sixth-grade readers included books based on movies or television, specialty magazines, comics, and cartoons. Ivey and Broaddus note that middle school students ranked their classrooms as “one of the least likely places to find the materials they want to read” (p. 368). It is interesting, then, that M. Williams (2001), citing the work of Beers (1998), observes that struggling readers in her classes were bewildered by the number of text choices available in the school library. In such cases, a responsive
classroom library becomes an appropriate resource for students. What might such a classroom library look like? McQuillan (2001) reports on a “book flood” program at an urban high school, in which struggling readers were given both time to read and a variety of texts from which to choose. McQuillan’s list of suggested titles is useful, but more important is the advice he gives for building a classroom library: Draw upon student opinions and use recommended reading lists. Research has also reported the kinds of texts that students do not like (Ivey; Hynds; Ivey & Broaddus; Morris, Ervin, & Conrad; Smith & Wilhelm). A significant but often overlooked aspect of reading choice goes beyond the question of text to the range of possibilities that marginalized readers are allowed in classroom practices. Ivey and Broaddus underscore the importance of choice, noting the discrepancy between educators’ expectations of students and the opportunities they afford them. The authors observe: “Most importantly, students are expected to become independent readers, yet they get limited opportunities to explore their own interests in reading, to read at their own pace, or make their own decisions about whether or not to read a book” (p. 350).

Given this information, what is the role of teachers and schools in supporting literacy learning for marginalized adolescent readers? Research expresses a clear need for teachers to develop personable relationships with their students to help them increase their sense of efficacy in all aspects of reading, from selecting texts, to developing stance, to acquiring subject-specific textual understandings. Adolescents who struggle with school reading need the opportunity to build on their indigenous literacies and to situate such literacies alongside school practices. Neither should trump the other; rather, research suggests that marginalized readers will benefit from the valuing of their nonschool literacies as they learn that all literacy practices are contextually bound. Listening to adolescents’ voices, we hear clearly the call for increased choice, which can also be understood as a call for recognizing their agency. Too often, we assume that struggling readers “lose pleasure in reading” and that, for them, reading becomes “an unpleasant activity” because of the competing modes of story available to them (Howerton & Thomas, 2004, p. 77). While there is no doubt that contemporary adolescents face a multitude of narrative possibilities, it is shortsighted to cast blame on media texts. Instead, we need to turn our focus to the relationships that we build with youth inside the classroom, relationships that have the power to value individuals, cultural backgrounds, and a range of textual and discursive practices. Finally, although this body of research richly describes adolescent literacy lives, still missing are the voices of those who struggle most with school literacy practices in the general education classroom and the voices of students from smaller but still marginalized populations, such as Native American and economically deprived rural youth. As researchers attend to the experiences of a broader range of adolescents, we will gain insight into how policy and teaching practices can best meet the needs of these students.

Zoom to Policy: Resisting Crisis and Rethinking the Issues

The third question under consideration is, How does reading policy address struggling adolescent readers? To improve the experiences of these students, we need to zoom out to obtain a wider perspective, one that recognizes the role that policy plays in shaping literacy learning. In this section, I review current national
literacy policy for adolescents, make recommendations for reshaping policy, and suggest directions for future research.

"Policy" is a slippery word. It can refer to a host of different dimensions, including classroom decisions ("My homework policy is to not accept late work"), school expectations ("Grover High School has a no-hats-on-campus policy"), state mandates ("All students in Grades 3, 5, and 9 will take the Iowa Test of Basic Skills"), or national aspirations ("All students will be able to read by the time they reach third grade"). Regardless of the context, one characteristic of policy is that it conveys an implied contract: You do X so that Y will or will not happen. In that sense, policy carries both promise and threat to those it addresses, and this highlights a salient point regarding policy: Policy is created by some individuals with the intent of imposing it on others. Yet once a policy has been given life through codification, it becomes an entity that will necessarily be shaped by other players. As teachers and administrators implement policies, they not only are involved in acts of interpretation but also are capable of authoring their own policies, which may contradict or undermine the received policy (Franzak, 2004; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Thus, in any given situation, there are multiple levels and manifestations of policy at work.

Brown (1991) defines policy as "a social agreement that has been expressed through formal public pronouncements, laws, and the rules and regulations that interpret and apply them" (p. 217). He further asserts that policy rationalizes what is possible by defining problems and posing solutions. This function of policy—which, in effect, shapes consciousness—is one of its most subtle yet powerful characteristics. In considering the effect of policy on marginalized adolescent readers, I construe "policy" to be both explicit and implicit in the construction of classroom experience and educational identities (Gee, 2001a).

**Current National Policy Related to Marginalized Adolescent Readers**

The current policy landscape is marked by a burgeoning interest in adolescent literacy learning. This is evident in the spate of recent reports, research studies, policy papers, and white papers issued by the federal government, philanthropic organizations, literacy researchers, regional education laboratories, and professional organizations. The mushrooming of policy concerns is visible in the activities of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the International Reading Association. These two entities, the major national organizations devoted to English language arts education, have amplified their efforts to include policy matters under their purview. The home page of the NCTE website features a link for adolescent and young adult literacy under the rubric of "policy issues," and the organization has plans to develop an office charged with increasing the visibility and effectiveness of the organization in the policy arena ("NCTE Lays Groundwork," 2005). The International Reading Association’s website links to adolescent literacy include a position statement and research articles promoting effective practice (www.reading.org). The organization has also recently published two books on reading policy, one a collection of previously published articles from the association (Shannon & Edmondson, 2005) and the other a monograph on critical policy analysis (Edmondson, 2004).

All of this activity is notable for several reasons. It suggests that teachers are being impelled to take an interest in policy. McDaniel and Miskel (2002), in a
Franzak report for the Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement, identify 118 groups and individuals active in the national reading policy domain. The range of constituents that they identify is broad, including individual elected officials, governmental entities, interest groups, professional organizations, and media outlets. What is especially significant, they argue, is that since the late 1990s, reading policies have been shaped by a broader base of constituents—"newcomers," as it were, to policymaking (McDaniel, Sims, & Miskel, 2001).

Equally important is that the proliferation of professional organizations' responses to policy matters is indicative of the contested policy terrain. If the policy landscape is peopled by more actors, it is also characterized by divergent perspectives. Because adolescent literacy policy has only recently become a focus of concern for researchers and policymakers (Moje, 2002), policy pertaining to adolescent literacy has not been well defined, even if the instructional approaches discussed earlier have credence with researchers and teachers. Historically, educational policy in adolescent reading has been predicated largely upon the belief that investment in early literacy instruction "will pay automatic dividends in accelerated literacy learning, enabling children to make the leap from learning to read to reading to learn" (Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001, p. 82). The federal government continues to promote this notion at times, claiming that secondary teachers are adopting the National Reading Panel's (NRP) five basic components of literacy instruction for elementary students as the base of pedagogy for older students: "Building on NRP's research, many educators are incorporating additional elements into their efforts to help high school students master reading skills and comprehension" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., p. 2). The assertion is unsupported by research, however. It is far more evident that a trickle-down effect of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is a widespread call for attention to the specific characteristics of adolescent literacy learning (Alvermann, 2003; Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Davis, Spraker, & Kushman, 2004; International Reading Association & National Middle School Association, 2001; Meltzer, Smith, & Clark, 2001; NCTE Commission on Reading, 2004; Vacca, 2002). Among the participants in this discourse are university-based scholars, government-sponsored researchers, and members of professional organizations, testifying to the fact that adolescent reading is clearly on the policy map. Given the contentious development and implementation of Reading First and NCLB from a policy perspective (Arnold, 2003; Edmondson & Shannon, 2003; Miskel & Song, 2004; Opuda, 2003; Pressley, Duke, & Boling, 2004; Stevens, 2003), it might be expected that the same would follow with initiatives on adolescent reading. What has emerged in the literature so far, however, suggests consensus on many levels.

A Sense of Crisis

The most significant point of agreement is the assertion that there is a problem with adolescent reading achievement. Policy documents from NCTE and the Alliance for Excellent Education cite the same statistics: "More than eight million children in America in grades four through twelve read at 'below basic' levels" (NCTE, n.d.; Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004b, p. 1). The statistic comes from the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) test, which has become the source cited when interest groups claim that adolescent reading achievement is in crisis. A federally produced policy text uses NAEP statistics to illustrate the
contention that "the state of literacy among American youth is alarming and not getting better" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., p. 1). It is also NAEP that the National Association of Secondary School Principals cites as primary evidence that "American students are reading and comprehending below expected levels, with approximately 25 percent of the students reading at 'below basic' level" (Phillips, 2004). Concerned that 6 million of the nation's 20 million adolescents between the ages of 15 and 19 have difficulty in reading and writing (www.principals.org/advocacy/secimp/cfm#adlit), this professional organization foregrounds adolescent reading as a policy and curricular priority (Phillips).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress monitors the knowledge, skills, and performance of the nation's children and youth in a variety of academic subjects and informs policymakers and the public about educational achievement in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Updated in 2002, the NAEP Reading Framework (National Assessment Governing Board, 2002) uses multiple-choice and constructed-response formats to assess the reading comprehension of students in Grades 4, 8, and 12: NAEP is intended to provide information about the performance of groups of students without endorsing specific curricular models. The Reading Framework does not cast itself in a policymaking role, but as a reflector of policy:

"National programs such as the Reading Excellence Act and No Child Left Behind focus on improving reading achievement. Policy and the commitment of resources at national and state levels continue to focus on this goal. Therefore, it makes sense that the NAEP Reading Framework should also reflect this aim. (National Assessment Governing Board, 2002, p. 6)"

Despite the intention not to drive policy per se, the NAEP Reading Framework results provide "the structures of consciousness" (Brown, 1991) that shape how policy groups and individual actors interpret and frame the achievement of adolescent readers.

The NAEP data form a fundamental building block in the structures of consciousness that underlie adolescent literacy discourse, a discourse that is permeated by rhetoric of a crisis of underachievement (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004a; Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Sturtevant, n.d.). Manzo (2003) asserts that the crisis is not as dire as purported, and Klink and Kibby (2000) maintain that high school reading achievement has actually increased since 1963. Nevertheless, the policy language widely employed to draw attention to adolescent reading defines the problem as present and dangerous. By naming the crisis, policy has solidified the existence of marginalized readers. That is, the definition of reading achievement necessitates the identity of failure. Alvermann (2001) suggests an alternative to the deprivation model of marginalized readers, that of "culture-as-disability." She draws on the work of McDermott and Varenne (1995) to explain: "Culture disables some of its members by developing what is assumed to be a stable (though arbitrary) set of tasks against which individuals can be measured and perhaps remediated" (p. 683). Alvermann writes, "It seems likely that struggling readers caught up in a society that insists on treating literacy as something that is hard to acquire will indeed experience difficulty in achieving competence in reading" (p. 684). In other words, if "reading" is defined and treated as a set of hierarchically listed tasks, some readers will continue to occupy the bottom rung of the literacy ladder. In policy texts, those
at the bottom in terms of literacy achievement are associated with the probability of economic failure as well.

The discourse of capitalism present in policy documents underscores the need for a literate citizenship. A fact sheet from the Alliance for Excellent Education, for example, begins with the statement “Our society is demanding ever more literate workers and citizens” (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2004a; emphasis added). Similarly, the introduction to the federal policy paper “Every Young American a Strong Reader” states, “This low level of practical literacy threatens to leave behind millions of America’s youth at a time when workplace and society require higher levels of reading, writing, and oral communication skills than ever before” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., p. 1). The introduction to a research report from the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory escalates the rhetoric: “The prolonged effects of poor reading and limited academic skills can lead to a host of negative outcomes including dropping out of school and engaging in criminal activities” (Davis, Spraker, & Kushman, 2004, p. 1). A 2002 report to the Carnegie Corporation cites a wide gap between good and poor readers and declares:

The benefits of an educated citizenry—to this nation and to the rest of the world—are not optional. It is a truism that higher education, once a mark of social standing and privilege, has become essential for full participation in the workplace. Full participation in a productive workforce ensures a sound tax base and deep participation in the activities that strengthen a democratic society: voting, community service, volunteerism, economic partnerships and collaborations and creative civic and social enterprises. (Grosso de León, p. 4)

Rhetoric that links literacy to social mobility and national security is anything but new (Gallagher, 2002; Gee, 1996; Myers, 1996; Stuckey, 1991); in this incarnation, special importance is accorded to the “the life skills [that students] will need for a highly flexible, changing global world” (Bean & Readence, 2002, p. 205). Without doubt, there are significant economic consequences for marginalized students. The policy conversation, however, is marked by a concern for societal consequences as much as for individuals. While this is indicative of a tacit understanding that policy should speak to social issues writ large, the complexity of the individual marginalized reader’s situation is not taken into account. One often-overlooked aspect of the policy discourse is the probability that many underachieving adolescent readers are capable but not engaged. That is, they choose to not read, for a host of reasons (Alvermann, 2004). One likely reason for such aliteracy (Alvermann, 2003) is the failure of literacy learning to be meaningful to adolescents. This can be the result of less-than-engaging instruction (Moje, 2000; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002), some adolescents’ nascent sense that the promised economic benefits will not materialize (MacLeod, 1995; Moje, 2000), or the school’s disregard for the digital and popular texts valued by youth (Alvermann, 2004; Hull & Schultz, 2001).

The sense of crisis is also evident in two workshops sponsored jointly by the government and influential professional organizations, including the International Reading Association and the National Education Association. The Partnership for Reading, a collaborative initiative by the National Institute for Literacy, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and the U.S. Department of Education, has disseminated a summary of the workshops online (at http://216.26.
A draft document illustrates the conception of reading that would guide the workshops:

Literacy is a broad concept, but it may be operationally defined in research as the ability of the learner to perform reading and writing tasks. . . . One especially important aspect of literacy during adolescence is comprehension, which . . . involves linguistic processing, communication, interpretation, integration, and inference. (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2002, “Outcomes of Interest,” paragraph 1)

With an emphasis on comprehension that acknowledges the roles of such culturally situated practices as interpretation, integration, and inference, it could be hoped that the workshops would problematize the notion of hierarchical achievement and identify research areas that are situated within a sociocultural framework. The documents resulting from the workshops, however, illustrate the preeminence of experimental research and a developmental approach to adolescent reading:

Development is taken as a superordinate principle in organizing this research agenda. We need to define the typical developmental process, and collect data on how many students are performing in a manner inconsistent with it, and what is necessary to alter the process to provide for more normative progress in the future for these students. (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2002, “Adolescent Literacy—The Development of Literacy in Middle and High School,” paragraph 9)

The lengthy research agenda established by the workshops does acknowledge the need to investigate sociocultural influences in adolescent reading identities and, at times, accents those concerns:

Intervention research must answer the question of which interventions are most effective, for which students, under which conditions. In determining “for which students,” it will be important to consider students’ linguistic and cultural differences in the design, implementation, and assessment of interventions’ effectiveness. (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2002, “Adolescent Literacy Research Priorities,” paragraph 1)

Yet the driving premise of a normative progression in adolescent literacy development accompanies a view that holds adolescents largely responsible for their failure to attain reading skills as defined in academic discourses. This structure of consciousness is evident in the opening remarks by Carol D’Amico, the assistant secretary of the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE). Under the title “The Threat and Challenge of Illiteracy,” statistics are cited and interpreted that lead to an alarmist view of adolescent literacy achievement, including the following:

...25 percent leave school without a diploma. Many drop out because they cannot read well enough to do the course work. About 56 percent of Hispanics, African Americans, and students with disabilities do not finish with a diploma 4 years after they start. They see it as impossible to catch up, so they give up and drop out.

The average 8th grader who is nonwhite or who is from a low-income family reads at three to four grade levels lower than whites and the more advantaged. (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2002).
Overlooked in the Crisis

Implicit in this characterization is a discourse that blames students for low achievement. The failure to problematize the material conditions of marginalized students' lives is a shortcoming of any adolescent literacy policy that aims to address inequity.

A tendency to suppress critical policy perspectives on adolescent literacy issues appears in the policy work of the Carnegie Corporation in collaboration with the Carnegie Advisory Council on Reading to Learn (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003) and the Alliance for Excellent Education (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004). The stated purpose of the Carnegie initiative is to "analyze how best to use... resources to develop and disseminate knowledge aimed at closing the many performance gaps in intermediate and adolescent literacy" and to foster "more favorable state and federal policies to assure funding streams and support systems for better literacy practices beyond grade three" (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2003).

A key conclusion of the 2003 report by Snow and Biancarosa is that not enough is known about effective teaching for struggling readers. Missing from the report is an ecological view of adolescent literacy that encompasses policy, theory, and practice. With such a view, researchers would seek to understand adolescent literacy learning in authentic school and nonschool settings and would situate achievement in terms of a range of literacy practices that address the highly mediated and textualized world we inhabit. An ecological view is also missing in the 2004 report by Biancarosa and Snow, which identifies a research base and calls for "an optimal mix" of 15 elements to improve reading achievement for marginalized readers. It is interesting to note that whereas the 2003 report claimed that not enough was known about effective instruction for adolescent readers, the 2004 report, from the same authors, cited a collaborative effort with members of the research community that resulted in agreement that enough is known about adolescent literacy to "act immediately on a broad scale" (Biancarosa & Snow, p. 10). The language of the report is that of intervention, although in this incarnation, the locus of the problem has shifted slightly from struggling adolescent readers to their teachers. In calling for improved instruction, the report implies that it is within the jurisdiction of a school itself to significantly improve reading achievement. The report acknowledges that some structural change is an important complement to instructional change, and that both together are likely to result in the greatest benefit.

Among the instructional elements that the report recommends are increasing motivation and self-directed learning by allowing student choice during free reading and including texts relevant to students' lives. These suggestions come closest to responding to marginalized readers through substantive change in curriculum. Alvermann (2003), drawing on the work of Luke and Elkins (2000), suggests that rather than remediating the student, we re/mediate the curriculum by including media and other texts that are important to adolescents. If adolescents approach texts important to them as vehicles to learn about and through, they may experience increased motivation, which may, in turn, decrease the preponderance of illiteracy.

While an ecological view of struggling readers is largely missing from policy discourse, what is present is the assumption that the problem exists and is not manufactured. The notion of a manufactured crisis was expertly raised by Berliner and Biddle (1995). Unfortunately, policy texts do not explore how the institution of
schooling contributes to the creation of marginalized readers or how schools are but part of a systemic unequal distribution of achievement and power.

The Role of Assessment

Recent policy documents such as the Carnegie reports, OVAE publications, and reports published by regional research laboratories, emphasize the importance of systematic assessment in improving achievement. This echoes an entrenched view of adolescent literacy that has been accompanied by a reliance on standardized tests for measures of literacy achievement. Garcia and Pearson (1991) list a variety of ways that standardized reading tests have been used over the years, including program evaluation, directing student placement, guiding instruction, and determining who has access to a range of educational experiences. One problem with these tests, they point out, is that “they obscure rather than confront the influence of students’ prior knowledge, reading strategies, or reasoning strategies” (p. 257; also see Johnston, 1984; Royer & Cunningham, 1981). Standardized tests also show a considerable difference in achievement levels between Anglo and non-Anglo students, as depicted in the OVAE newsletter, leading some educators to comment on their inherent racial and cultural bias (Agnello, 2001; Au, 2000).

Despite these limitations, standardized tests carry significant currency in today’s education policy and practice. Referring to a problem known as “test score pollution,” Pearson, Vyas, Sensale, and Kim (2001) report that standardized test results do not correlate with a rise or fall in the cognitive phenomena that they purport to measure. Drawing on the work of Cuban, they maintain that [p]ollution is most likely to occur when policymakers use high-stakes exams to try to change curricula and the way teachers teach (Cuban 1991). The content that is covered in schools may change, and districts often respond to external pressure from the state or the school board by restructuring their curricula completely around the test, making students’ learning experiences as narrow as the tests themselves. (p. 177)

As Pearson et al. (2001) suggest, high-stakes testing can have direct consequences for adolescent readers. In a position statement, the International Reading Association has expressed concern that “testing has become a means of controlling instruction as opposed to a way of gathering information to help students become better readers” (International Reading Association, 1999, p. 305). Ransom et al. identify two possible outcomes of standardized testing: (a) Tests that have no specific decision tied to them become high-stakes when pressure is exerted on administrators and policymakers as a result of publicized scores; and (b) other tests, such as state-mandated reading tests, become high-stakes when educational or personnel decisions are based on the results. Thus policy is currently driven by assessment tools that do little to improve the actual reading lives and experiences of marginalized readers. The return to a decoding/analytic definition of reading tested by standardized instruments does not allow for developments such as reader response and critical pedagogy in planning curricula. If adolescent literacy policy is to be effective, it must be responsive to adolescents’ authentic needs and behaviors as readers of multiple texts. It must allow for individual responses, and it must teach students how to recognize cultural responses. Such a policy acknowledges student agency and fosters accountability where it most matters—in students’ views of their own reading abilities.
Policy Potential: Reshaping Policy for Struggling Adolescent Readers

Current policy related to adolescent readers reflects what others have noted for early literacy learning, namely an increasingly activist role at the national level to control what happens in classrooms (Learning Point Associates, n.d.). Policy documents such as the Alliance for Excellent Education reports, OVAE white papers, NCTE issue briefs, and regional laboratory research reports are careful to promote the notion that there is no magic bullet or one-size-fits-all approach to improving adolescent literacy learning. At the same time, however, the documents represent a shift to thinking about secondary reading instruction as a matter for national consideration and intervention. Current policy texts may not propose a single solution, but they do advocate a number of interventions or programs as needed reforms. Fundamental to this conception of policy is a trend toward seeking solutions in places other than classrooms and locating expert knowledge outside the teacher. Not only does this paradigm undervalue teachers’ abilities to make informed and appropriate decisions, but it also fails to recognize the considerable policy role that they exercise. Valencia and Wixson (2000) found that, although literacy policy influences teachers’ beliefs and practices, there is significant variation in how teachers interpret and apply policy. Thus a policy may not result in the intended outcome, not because the policy was misguided but because teachers are individuals who express agency in designing and delivering their lessons. McGill-Franzen (2000), paraphrasing McLaughlin (1992), shares this view and sums it up nicely:

Teaching may be too complicated, too embedded in context, and too tied to individual beliefs and knowledge for policy to have a predictable and consistent effect. That is not to say that policy has no effect, because it does, but it does so as one of myriad influences that make up the context of teaching and learning. (p. 906)

To fully benefit students, policy should not ignore the considerable policymaking role of teachers. Rather than view teachers as mere conduits for policy, policymakers need to see them as key policy players (Ruth, 2003); it is in the classroom that policy most directly affects the experiences of individual students. By designing and delivering instruction, teachers have enormous impact on the development of school reading identities. Thus what it means to be a struggling reader in one classroom may be different for the same individual in a different classroom or in a different year (Franzak, 2003, 2004). In light of these facts, researchers and policymakers should broaden their conception of the policymaking process to include the role of classroom teachers. Likewise, teachers also need to redefine their role and see policy not as a series of static regulations authored by others but as a process in which they are key players. When this happens, teachers’ investment in policy will increase, as will the likelihood of sustained inquiry into effective teaching. It is inquiry-driven, context-specific professional development that has the greatest potential to improve how we meet the needs of marginalized readers.

Another aspect of reconsidering adolescent reading policy is the exercise of imagining what policy would look like if it were not based on a crisis-driven intervention model. Although significant policy texts do acknowledge the importance of enhancing literacy learning for all adolescents and the value of reading for personal fulfillment (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, & Rycik, 1999; National Council of Teachers of English Commission on Reading, 2004), an alarmist tone and intervention ori-
Marginalized Adolescent Readers

entation characterizes the discourse on the whole. It seems clear that, as Greenleaf et al. (2001) suggest, "We are not now, nor have we ever been, doing a good enough job" (p. 84) of supporting adolescent reading development. Policy can certainly help improve our work with adolescent readers. However, if we can resist the temptation to see deficiencies in our students or teachers, we are more likely to be able to see what material, systemic conditions contribute to the creation and sustentation of marginalized adolescent readers. Policy might then enable teachers to make informed decisions about the most appropriate pedagogy and curriculum for particular students. The kind of thought contributed by critical policy analysts (Edmondson, 2000, 2002, 2005; Stevens, 2003) is needed not only after a policy has been developed but also as an integral part of the policy process. If critical perspectives were taken into account in forming policy, marginalized adolescent readers would likely benefit. Such a process would allow for context-specific responses and would hold the needs of these readers at the core of the process.

Finally, it is important that policy speak to the diversity of learners and literacy values present in classrooms. Policy that fosters meaningful achievement will draw upon adolescents' cultural and social contexts. It will invite students to learn from and about their indigenous literacies and will promote critical inquiry into the dominance of some literacy values over others. Such a move depends on teachers' becoming active examiners of the social, political, and economic contexts in which they teach. This kind of policy role offers transformative potential for both students and teachers.

Implications for Further Research:

Re-Zoom on Policy in the Lives of Marginalized Readers

Just as Banyai's book Zoom (1995) moves the reader from micro to macro, his companion work, Re-Zoom (1998) takes the reader on an inward journey to see the hidden texture of our world. The intersection of research in policy studies and literacy learning offers the same potential to increase our understanding of how seemingly distant policy initiatives affect individual readers. The research specifically addressing policy with regard to adolescent readers is still scant, yet there is increasing recognition that literacy scholars must pay attention to policy in terms of both research and advocacy (Allington, 1999; Biancarosa & Snow, 2004; Dutro, Fisk, Koch, Roop, & Wixson, 2002; Edmondson, 2005, 2002; Fitzgerald, Morrow, Gambrell, Calfee, Venezy, Woo, et al., 2002; Mraz, 2004; Pressley, Duke, & Boling, 2004; Stevens, 2003; Vacca, 2002). Much of this work centers on the highly visible policy initiative substantiated in NCLB and thus speaks particularly to early reading issues. At this key time in history, when what happens in classrooms appears to be increasingly affected by external controls and influences, it is essential for adolescent literacy researchers to attend to policy discourse and the application of policy in classrooms. Research areas that will add depth to our understanding of marginalized readers include the following four recommendations (not listed in order of priority).

First, because policy affects what happens in classrooms (though indirectly at times), it is important to explore how it shapes the literacy values and practices of teachers and, ultimately, how student reading experiences are constructed as a result of that policy. Possible studies could explore how teachers articulate their understanding of policy, the nature of adolescent reading in classroom instruction.
as a result of policy, the strategies that adolescents employ to read and to avoid reading assigned texts, the place of independent choice of reading in policy-driven curriculum, and how the changing policy climate affects the relationship between reading and studying literature. By supplementing the experimental data bound to be collected as the current wave of policy reaches classrooms, studies such as these would provide us with a deeper understanding of how policies designed to improve reading achievement really affect adolescents.

Second, it is important to expand the areas of critical and functional policy analysis because both serve important purposes in clarifying what policy is and how it evolves. Critical policy analysis, in particular, needs to explore the money trail associated with policy endeavors, as it has begun to do with the implementation of Reading First. It is of note, for example, that four of the six interventions identified in “Every Young American a Strong Reader” (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.) are commercially produced and profit-generating strategies. President George W. Bush has made clear his intention to expand the provisions of NCLB to secondary education (http://www.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget06/nclb/index.html), and it seems likely that much of the money spent in implementing various interventions will go to private enterprises. Further research framed within critical policy analysis can lead to greater understanding of the policy process if researchers investigate how particular notions of reading or intervention come to be accepted as appropriate for specific schools.

Third, qualitative researchers need to continue to explore the literacy lives of adolescents and their teachers and to advocate for the inclusion of qualitative research as a valuable source of knowledge. At this juncture, it is apparent that quantitative research is the currency that most clearly informs policy. Striving Readers, for example, is a federal discretionary grants program that allocates money to implement research-based interventions for struggling readers in middle and high schools. Not surprisingly, given current federal definitions of research, a required component of awarded programs is “rigorous experimental evaluation” (http://www.ed.gov/programs/strivingreaders/index.html). This picture would be incomplete without the thick, rich description offered by qualitative researchers who can document the complex interactions of policy in practice. Also needed is the depth of detail that qualitative research gives us about the lived experiences of adolescents as they engage in a multitextual world in school. As educators come to recognize the importance of digital texts and our definition of what counts as reading expands to include multiple forms of media, it is important that we understand how students and teachers navigate this development in their specific contexts. Qualitative research is well suited to create a better understanding of the complexity involved in policy processes (Purcell-Gates, 2000; Roller & Long, 2001).

Finally, researchers should attend to both the macro and the micro levels of policy processes. On the national level, researchers can continue to investigate the character and substance of policy initiatives related to struggling adolescent readers. That information is needed to track the expanding realm of adolescent literacy policy, especially as centralized policy seems likely to devalue classroom teachers’ knowledge and context-specific initiatives. Research at the school level can provide much-needed information about variations in policy implementation, the relationship between sociocultural context and policy initiatives, and the impact of policy on teachers, administrators, and students. As noted by Moje (2002), it is important
Marginalized Adolescent Readers

to listen to adolescents themselves and attend to what they have to tell us about their literacy learning.

Final Thoughts

As adolescent literacy educators and researchers become more active participants in the policy process, we will be informers rather than recipients of policy (Valencia & Wixson, 2000). We need to turn our attention to adolescent literacy learning not only to understand the pedagogical practices that are effective in extending adolescents' ability to read texts and contexts, but also to look broadly at how we define and perpetuate reading achievement hierarchies through policy mechanisms. In the language of policy, it is easy to overlook the fact that struggling or marginalized readers are, in fact, individuals. The schooling that they receive is produced through theory and policy, which, in turn, directly affect the types of learning opportunities that become available to them. We need to remain aware that policy decisions and instructional models ultimately contribute to the production of certain kinds of readers. It is our responsibility to participate in policy and research processes with a "zoom" consciousness that allows us to see both the big picture of the educational environment and the students at the center of our work.

Note

I am grateful to Jayne Downey and Elizabeth Noll for their feedback on earlier drafts of this article. I also wish to thank Janette Klingner for her editorial guidance and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

References


239


Marginalized Adolescent Readers


Marginalized Adolescent Readers


Franzak


244
Marginalized Adolescent Readers


Franzak


Author

JUDITH K. FRANZAK is an Assistant Professor of Education in the Department of Education, Montana State University, Bozeman, MT 59717; e-mail jfranzak@montana.edu. Her research and teaching interests include adolescent literacy learning, young adult literature, and policy in the classroom context.