Literacy Identities of Youth Identified for Special Education: Who Is Responsible?

Kathleen A. Hinchman
Syracuse University

In the spirit of many past National Reading Conference presidential addresses, this paper takes an advocacy stance to answer the question raised in the title. In it I share experiences to outline ways that mainstream literacy educators, including me, have excluded individuals identified for special education from their work. I then draw on disabilities studies (Biklen, 2005; Kliewer, Biklen, & Kasa-Hendrikson, 2006) and sociocultural perspectives toward literacy (O'Brien, 2003; Street, 1995) to attend to video representations of the literacy identities of three young people who were identified for special education services. Finally, I invite National Reading Conference (NRC) members to join me in assuming responsibility for conducting the various kinds of research needed to improve literacy instruction for all young people, including those with identified disabilities.

Why is this important? When a teacher encounters a student who struggles with literacy instruction, she can find an increasing number of recommendations in the mainstream literacy literature for initial instructional interventions (Johnston, 2010; Lipson & Wixson, 2010). It is far more difficult to find satisfactory instructional advice for those for whom preliminary interventions do not work, as can be the case for individuals with severe learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, or intellectual disabilities. Some students are even assumed to be unable to benefit from literacy instruction on the basis of their labels or indecipherable communication. Even more specialized research literature recommends only rudimentary sight word instruction or other emergent literacy activities, with little said about developing decoding, comprehension, or writing. The classroom reality is that limited literacy instruction occurs, if any (Duffy, 2009; Kliewer, Biklen, & Kasa-Hendrickson, 2006; Mirenda, 2003).

However, as more schools move toward including all students in classrooms regardless of identified disabilities, parents, teachers, the community, and students themselves will demand productive literacy instruction for all (Yell, Drasgow, & Lowrey, 2005). A growing body of literature suggests that such engagement is possible but that more work is needed to direct our efforts (Chandler-Olcott & Kluth, 2009; Dickinson, McCabe, & Essex, 2006; Erickson, Clendon, Abraham, Roy, & Van de Carr, 2005; Farrell & Elkins, 1995; Kliewer & Biklen, 2006; Koppenhaver & Erickson, 2003; Lemons & Fuchs, 2010; Mirenda, 2003). Because of NRC members' expertise and varied perspectives toward literacy, we are well positioned to address this need.

EXPERIENCES THAT BROUGHT ME TO THIS ISSUE

Despite my long interest in young people's perspectives toward in- and out-of-school literacies (Hinchman, Payne-Bourcy, Sheridan-Thomas, & Chandler-Olcott, 2002), I have only recently begun explicitly conducting research with young people identified for special education services (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009; Hinchman 2008). I previously limited my work to students who participated in regular education settings, overlooking those who were excluded from such settings. My decisions embody larger social constructions that have limited many literacy researchers'

attentions to the needs of such learners. In the following section, I trace the history of this decision-making to make such social constructions more explicit.

Fostering Literacy, Or Not, Under P.L. 94-142

I began teaching English in a junior high school near Syracuse in the mid-1970s, and my college roommate went into secondary special education. My roommate argued that she was making a difference for young people about whom few cared, and I thought that I was sharing my love of literature and writing. Why her students would not have appeared on my first class rosters did not occur to me. This was at the same time that U.S. Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, was beginning to be implemented in schools across the country. This new law "guaranteed a free, appropriate public education to each child with a disability in every state and locality across the country" (United States Department of Education, 2007). By the time I realized the implications of this law for my life as an English teacher, I had also realized that not every junior high school student shared my love of literature and writing.

When I moved into a reading specialist position at the same school, the special education teacher, school psychologist, and I initially implemented P.L. 94-142 by negotiating who would provide instruction to our most severely disabled readers. We shared an approach to problem solving that began with identifying potential causes of students' literacy difficulties without realizing that our reference to this causal model might restrict how we viewed young people's potential (Hinchman & Michel, 1999; Johnston & Allington, 1991). I did not even know that some severely disabled readers in our attendance zone did not attend our school because they were bused to a regional educational facility.

Influential to our decisions were reading expectancy formulas (Harris & Sipay, 1975). This causal model calculation compared young people's mental ages to reading grade equivalents to determine potential to benefit from reading instruction. Young people with measured intelligence that was lower than average were said to be working at capacity when their reading achievement was less than that of peers, and instructional expectations were lowered as a result. Such formulas were to help reading specialists attend to students who could make the most gains, referring others to special education.

As P.L. 94-142 was tested in courts, its provision for "access for children with disabilities" (USDE, 2007, p. 3) was increasingly interpreted to mean access to all activities—even when activities were undifferentiated and did little to address children's needs. Special education teachers helped students complete schoolwork, sometimes by reading, dictating, or writing it for them, and leaving little time for literacy instruction (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989).

Fostering Literacy, Or Not, As a Literacy Education Professor

After my doctoral studies I was sometimes asked to teach elementary reading methods classes. Without suitable teaching experience, I referred to the table of contents in a bestselling textbook to organize my syllabus. I was comforted when its organization referred to causes of reading disability. I gained the most confidence from this sentence:

> Because most children have the intelligence, motivation, emotional stability, and physical health necessary to learn to read and to enjoy reading and because most schools have good teachers, good instructional materials, and good conditions for

> learning, most children in our country learn to read with relatively little difficulty. (Smith & Johnson, 1976, p. 28)

As a result, I thought that the text's contents represented the necessary and sufficient information to suit preservice teachers' needs (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). That the statement excluded many young people did not occur to me or my earliest methods students.

I also worked as a project director for several adult literacy projects in collaboration with Laubach Literacy and Literacy Volunteers, both of which were founded in Syracuse. I had the chance to see how these organizations struggled at their fiftieth anniversaries when adults seeking services brought a history of special education. These students were learning to read even though they had usually attended segregated schools, although in several cases they were actual former students whom my colleagues and I had failed. I was humbled when a Student-of-the-Year pointed to me during a talk, saying, "I am here because I didn't pay attention to my reading teachers. Look, there's one in the back of the room! Miss Hinchman, I am sorry I didn't listen to you when I had the chance."

When I moved into my current literacy education faculty position at Syracuse, I abandoned my dependence on tables of contents and organized classes to balance literature-based inquiry with methods of teaching literacy skills and strategies (Duffy & Roehler, 1993; Leu & Kinzer, 1995). By helping my students to enhance the literacy understandings of their students, I was confident they could deliver suitable instruction, at least in the rudimentary fashion expected of beginning teachers (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 2005). In response, I was sometimes confronted by impatient 20-year-olds who responded to our new program's inclusive ideology with considerable enthusiasm, implicitly calling me out on the parameters of my enculturation:

Student: Dr. Hinchman, there's a fifth grader in my classroom who can't read at all!!

KH: Is he labeled?

Student: What difference would that make?

That my students could not interact with individuals in segregated facilities did not occur to me until my students pointed it out. My interactions with such insightful students helped me to deconstruct assumptions that children's special education status somehow indicated whether they would benefit from literacy instruction. I even began to look for students with special needs at my research sites rather assume they were someone else' concern.

Another of my standing teaching assignments, a summer literacy education MS practicum, added to my understanding regarding the needs of students identified for special education. With prompting from doctoral students, I began to solicit tutees identified for special education services. One young man came to our practicum through a high school guidance counselor; I have written about him elsewhere as a highly motivated young adult who grew excited when learning word patterns extended his ability to read interesting materials (Hinchman, 2008). Another had a label of severely mentally retarded changed to learning disabled when her tutor gave her fidget toys to help her focus while she learned to read. Still another grew confident in defending opinions in book club discussions—progress that encouraged his school district to augment literacy professional development for special education teachers.

This school district, like others, was also encouraged to help special education teachers provide literacy instruction because of the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as No Child Left Behind. The two laws required states to have goals for the performance of children with disabilities that were the same as the State's objectives for adequate yearly progress by all children, and that addressed graduation and dropout rates, as well as other goals and standards for children established by the state. The new laws also asked school districts to report reading performance of all students, disaggregated by subpopulations that included special education status, and special education students were allowed fewer testing accommodations. Many school districts have been embarrassed by resultant revelations about special education students' literacy achievement. Whether such requirements were the most viable solution to tracking individuals' needs and progress was debatable, yet the requirements clearly caused schools to pay attention to all students' literacy progress in new ways (Darling-Hammond, 2007; USDE 2004).

Soon after these changes, like many NRC members, I began to work with local schools seeking advice for improving literacy achievement of special education students. I referred them to the growing body of research-based interventions that might preclude identification, such as those described by Clay (1993), Blachman and Tangel (2008), Vellutino and Scanlon (2002), Deshler and Schumaker (1988), and Schoenbach and colleagues (1999). But according to Lipson and Wixson (2009), many schools are steering clear of teacher-dependent problem-solving in favor of standardized commercial interventions to alleviate concerns that students' failure could too often be caused by poor teaching. It's problematic that such interventions are prescribed for students who are categorized by test score or special education label with the assumption that all their needs are alike. The truth is actually quite different: There is "no quick fix," especially for individuals who experience the world in nonmainstream ways (Allington & Walmsley, 2007). Research-based instructional recommendations that take such differences into account are hard to find.

Most IDEA and NCLB stipulations remain in new Race to the Top initiatives, as well as in anticipated Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization. However, education experts suggest use of individual growth modeling to document students' individual progress rather than comparison of individuals' performance to standard cut scores, changes that would well serve students with special needs. Cut score models have been dubbed "hurdle models" by some, resulting in what Pearson called "perverse incentives" to school districts to provide instruction only to students closest to making the cut (Pearson, 2009)—yet another reason that the literacy learning needs of students with significant disability labels have been ignored.

WHAT DISABILITY STUDIES AND SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVES SUGGEST ABOUT LITERACY IDENTITIES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IDENTIFIED FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

Analyses that reach beyond the preceding narrative are needed to better understand literacy instruction that has been or could be provided to individuals identified with reading, learning, communicative, and intellectual disabilities. Described in the following section, disabilities studies and sociocultural perspectives toward literacy can help us to understand, dismantle, and reconstruct beliefs about literacy and identity. Such excavation is one kind of research that can help us develop

alternative literacy pedagogies that appreciate and respond to all young people's literacy initiations in newly productive ways.

The Disability Studies Perspective

The disabilities studies perspective begins with the idea that "disability" is a way that society positions people relative to a society's constructions of normal. This sociocultural perspective was developed to theorize, understand, and advocate for individuals who are constructed as disabled. The perspective does not dispute that individuals viewed as disabled may experience the world in ways that differ from other people. Instead, scholarship from this perspective explores how social constructions concerned with disability are enacted, as well as how various identities related to disability are inscribed on some bodies and not others. The slash in dis/ability that is sometimes used by those who work from this perspective is to call attention to the false binary of either/or social categories that are often used to classify people and instruction relative to such individuals, such as dis/abled and special/regular education (Biklen, 2005; Kliewer, Biklen, & Kasa-Hendrikson, 2006).

The disabilities studies perspective is not to be confused with the reading disabilities perspective that prevailed in literacy instruction for much of the last century and that was a focus of my reading specialist training (Harris & Sipay, 1975). Johnston and Allington's (1991) *Handbook of Reading Research* chapter, "Remediation," contains a thorough discussion of the reading disabilities perspective. From this perspective, differences in individuals' literacy development were attributed to such factors as background, education, physical and mental health, language processing, and cognitive ability.

The reading disabilities perspective has often been described as representing a "medical model" worldview because of its implication that if one somehow addressed, or treated, the causes of reading disability, one could achieve more effective instructional results. The source of reading disability was located within the individual, and individual performance was judged according to such socially constructed criteria as what it means to be meeting sixth-grade standards or reading at a third-grade level. This worldview is typically juxtaposed with a more contemporary notion of literacy instruction that begins, instead, with young people's existing ideas and insights about the workings of literacy rather than their history (Clay, 1993).

That discussion of reading disability focused on individuals' deficits relative to socially constructed standards aligns this perspective with other, deficit-oriented perspectives critiqued by disabilities studies scholars. Various analyses tell us that the dawning of the twentieth century abounded with psychologists who tested various constructs, such as intelligence and reading comprehension, by comparing individual performance against average (Gould, 1981). Individuals like Edmund Burke Huey, called the father of the psychology of reading, and Goddard, the father of American intelligence testing and special education, employed such techniques in their work (Hartman, 2007; Zenderland, 1998).

It is now commonly accepted, even beyond the disabilities studies community, that the most brutal form of sort-and-select historically occurred for individuals with what were thought to be the most severe mental disabilities. Prior to the 1960s, parents of infants born with Down syndrome, a chromosomal abnormality that yields observable physical markers along with cognitive manifestations, were told by physicians to place their children in institutions, often despite desires

to raise such children with family. Other behaviors that could result in a child's institutionalization included inability to speak, hear, see, learn, or act in what were seen as normal ways. Burton Blatt, a former School of Education Dean at Syracuse University, was a Massachusetts state education department official who visited state mental institutions with a photographer in the mid 1960s to reveal the tragedies in how such places treated people (Blatt & Kaplan, 1966). Their photographs, combined with Blatt's testimony before the Supreme Court in the mid 1970s, led to passage of P.L. 94-142, which brought young people with severe disabilities from institutions to schools (USDE, 2007).

However successful such advocacy was at closing institutions, the kinds of schools individuals with significant disabilities were allowed to attend varied widely, as was the instruction offered. As I have noted elsewhere in this paper, many young people with some kinds of disabilities have received minimal or no literacy instruction. Only within the last few years have researchers begun documenting literacy learning by individuals with significant intellectual or communicative disabilities in ways that hint there is more to be understood about this important area (Biklen, 2005; Chandler-Olcott & Kluth, 2009; Colasent & Griffith, 1998; Kliewer,1998; Kliewer, et al., 2004; Koppenhaver & Erickson, 2003; Lemon & Fuchs, 2010; Mirenda, 2003).

We brought young people with significant disabilities to public schools in the 1970s, though not much was offered to them in the way of literacy instruction. In the meantime, students with significant high-incidence learning disabilities were often placed together in resource rooms with students with emotional difficulties and low-incidence intellectual or communicative disabilities. Their special education teachers could not offer suitable literacy instructional to all the students in such challenging settings (Katims, 2000). One wonders how many literacy initiations of students with various kinds of disabilities have been overlooked, ignored, or attended to in inappropriate ways in such settings, data that are unavailable because so many young people were historically excluded from assessment.

Sociocultural Views of Literacy

Sociocultural views of literacy hold that our meaning construction is situated in particular institutional, historical, and societal contexts that mediate and are mediated by the social world (Lewis, Enciso, & Moje, 2007). One version of this theory holds that, in an age when communicative media and social groups evolve rapidly and vary widely, our multimodal literacies allow us to communicate as we move from home to work, and to various other affinity groups (New London Group, 1996; Street, 1995). Use of the plural, literacies, is intended to move the discussion from a view of literacy as singular, autonomous, universal reading and writing skills to the multiple, interwoven, multimodal skills and strategies specific to particular social contexts, each embedded with power relations and invoking texts representing multiple modalities (O'Brien, 2003; Alvermann, 2008).

Scholars have begun to explore communication strategies deployed within and across these various literacies, including those involving individuals' use of assistive technologies, as well as others demonstrated by individuals who struggled with or were not invited to explore academic literacies (Kliewer, 1998; 2008). The idea of multiple literacies provides a way to understand the communicative transactions of individuals whose literacies were not historically recognized. Chandler-Olcott and Kluth (2009) point out:

> Such a conceptualization invites participation by a wider range of learners, including those who have traditionally been seen as at risk (O'Brien, 2003), and makes visible strengths and interests that might otherwise be lost as resources for literacy instruction. (p. 14)

Kliewer and Biklen (2007) reviewed commonalities in literacy demonstrations by significantly developmentally disabled individuals to find that, when local understandings included expectations that such individuals desired communication and appreciated unconventional initiations, these individuals demonstrated a variety of literacy initiations—despite previous diagnoses that asserted that literacy demonstrations would be impossible. Similarly, Chandler-Olcott and Kluth (2009) explored how individuals with autism spectrum disorders demonstrated multiple literacies. Both lines of work suggest that it is easier to recognize literacy development in such individuals when interactions begin with a presumption of competence and desire to communicate, even though communication may not be demonstrated in typical ways (Biklen, 2005).

Sociocultural scholars have suggested that the intersection of literacy and identity is important to study because people's identities shape and are shaped by the texts they read, produce, and talk about (Gee, 2001; McCarthey & Moje, 2002). Such scholars have drawn on wide-ranging theorists, including but not limited to Mead (1934), Anzaldúa (1999), Bakhtin (1981), and Bourdieu (1992). Lewis and delValle (2009) explained that work in this area has considered identity as made up of stable characteristics constructed through cultural affiliation, explored performance of literacy practices mediating identity in social settings, and, most recently looked at identity as "hybrid, metadiscursive, and spatial," in connection with literacy practices "networked within local and global flows of activity" (p. 317). Moje and Luke (2009) added that, "Learning, from a social and cultural perspective, involves people in participation, interaction, relationships, and contexts, all of which have implications for how people make sense of themselves and others, identify, and are identified" (p. 416).

Noting the proliferation of literacy-and-identity studies, Moje and Luke (2009) caution those who conduct research in this area to seek precision in their use of these constructs, and they posit five metaphors to capture the various conceptualizations of identity invoked by these studies. The identity-as-difference metaphor is used in analyses that focus on how individuals identify with and use literacy practices that are situated within sense of self as tied to a social group. Studies utilizing the identity-as-self metaphor represent a range of perspectives regarding constitution of self, including how one deploys various texts and literacy practices to be certain kinds of people, or not. Analyses that draw on identity-as-mind or -consciousness metaphor hold that literacy is a tool for developing mind. Identity-as-narrative work explores what and how literacy practices are performed in stories people tell to represent themselves. The identity-as-position metaphor is employed by those studies exploring how individuals enact or resist literacy practices and tools that order, or position, individuals relative to one another in space.

These five metaphors also give us a way to conceptualize studies into how literacy resonates in the lives of individuals identified with disabilities that have historically minimized their opportunities for literacy instruction. For instance, a third-grader's resistance to assigned literacy tasks that make him look stupid may be telling us how literacy positions her in her classroom. That a middle school student asks for help with unconventional spelling and sentence structure to blog

is telling us about his sense of self and desire to communicate in a digital world. When a young woman chooses a trade book that seems too difficult, plowing through with dictionary in hand, she is enacting agency in ways that are important to understand.

Clay (1966) long ago suggested that young people demonstrate nascent understandings of literacy before they are able to read or write, and that these initiations lay the groundwork for literacy development. Research since then has explored various aspects of these initiations, much of which considered the sociocultural view that children's literacy initiations stemmed from their recognition of functions of print in social contexts (Teale & Sulzby, 1986). More recently, researchers have explored demonstrations of multiple literacies and identities represented in these initiations (Siegel, Kontovourki, Schmier, & Enriquez, 2008).

Other research emphasizes the role of oral language in emergent literacy (Snow, Griffin, & Burns, 1998), suggesting that "children who were identified as having oral language impairments in preschool were at greater risk for oral and written language impairment as they progressed through school, even if their language impairments appeared to have been remediated by the time they entered kindergarten" (Rhyner, 2009, p. 2). Of course it is important for educators to ameliorate such difficulties when they can. However, we also need literacy instruction that decouples oral language and print literacy for students with oral difficulties. Yet single-minded focus on oral language remediation may cause caregivers and educators to miss opportunities that present themselves in young people's demonstrations of literacy and identity, especially when demonstrations are unconventional (Chandler-Olcott & Kluth, 2009).

Literacy Identities: Three Cases

Developing understandings of unconventional and multimodal demonstrations of literacy and identity, as well as of suitable instructional responses to such various demonstrations—even when they are not likely to yield passing scores on high-stakes tests—is an important focus for research. Melding the terms "literacies" and "identities"—both plural—into a single term, "literacy identities" gives researchers a way to recognize all young people's literacy initiations, in various modalities, without limiting observations to oral-to-written language or academic traditions. Such a term could allow educators to presume competence, that is, assume that young people communicate as they can, and that each demonstration provides important insight. Such a term may also invite young people to consider how they might position themselves relative to developing competence in various representational modes suited to their aspirations.

In this section, I share transcripts from video representations of three young people who were identified for special education services. These individuals, Susan, Peter, and Terrance, have been identified with autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, and a learning disability, respectively. These video representations are limited; they are included to hint of the kind of research that might be possible to explore the literacy identities such enact on a day-to-day basis, hints that need to be more systematically understood with additional literacy research so that appropriate instructional responses can be designed.

Example 1: Susan

Consider Susan, a young woman with autism who was the focus of the Academy Award-nominated documentary, *Autism is a World* (Rubin & Wurzburg, 2004), a film that should be seen

in its entirely to understand Susan better. As you scan the following transcript excerpts, consider: Who was Susan's most important teacher? How were her literacy instructional needs likely dealt with in school before and after she learned to communicate? How have her enactments of literacy identities evolved over time?

Susan's written words were read by a narrator throughout the film, as in the excerpts included below. Her mother is also interviewed in the included excerpts.

> My name is Sue Rubin. I am 26 years old. I have written these thoughts about my life because I don't really talk. This is not my voice but these are my words. I have autism. And until the age of 13, everyone assumed I was also retarded. Now I live on my own with assistance from others…
>
> I certainly understand why I was assumed to be retarded. All of my very awkward movements and all my nonsense sounds made me appear retarded. Perhaps I was. Voices floated over me. I heard sounds but not words. It wasn't until I had a communication system that I was able to make sense out of the sounds. When I was 13, Jackie, my educational psychologist, called my mother and said that she had seen someone with autism, who was like me, start to communicate using a keyboard in support…
>
> Progress was slow at first. I was a terrible subject because of my behaviors, but my mom insisted that I practice every day. As I began to type, my mind began to wake up...
>
> Susan's mother: I asked her if she could type three vegetables. And you can see it was really difficult for her to get anything and it just looked like gibberish to me. I saw that she was doing S-P, S-I, S-P-I, and so I said to her, do you mean spinach. And then she got it. She typed "spinach." And then I said to her one more and you can go. She typed "kale." K-A-L-E. I have no idea where that came from because I never buy kale. I don't like kale. I don't make kale. She never had kale. But anyway, she typed kale.
>
> When she started communicating, she was reassessed and she had another psychological examination and, where before she had tested at the two and a half year level, which is about a 29 I.Q. for someone who is 13, she ended up testing 133 I.Q. So when it came time for her to go to high school, we knew she had to be in regular classes in an academic program.

Susan graduated from high school and was a junior in college at the time the film was made; the film documents her participation in a college class, typing answers to the professor's questions to be read by her assistant as other students scrambled to locate answers in their notebooks. Her mother was one of her most important teachers, teaching Susan to type her thoughts on a keyboard. The kind of one-to-one help that Ms. Rubin's mother was able to provide, responding to Susan's initiations, has not typically been available in school. Her mother presumed competence, figured out ways to unlock Susan's communication abilities, and Susan flourished as a result. Learning to read and write the language she had been hearing and not comprehending helped Susan to enact literacies and identities in important new ways.

Example 2: Peter

Peter was a nine-year-old boy with Down's syndrome at the time the film, *Educating Peter*, was made (Wurzburg, 1992), another film that should be viewed in its entirety for added insight. First shown on HBO, this Academy Award-winning film chronicled Peter's third-grade year in a newly inclusive classroom. As you read the classroom excerpts included below, ask yourself how Peter's enactments of literacy identities evolved throughout the school year. How did this teacher respond to his literacy initiations, and how did Peter respond to her in turn?

The following excerpt is a classroom sequence from early in the school year.

Peter: [Looking up from his writing] Miss Dice? I stupid.

Teacher: No you're not. Just get to work. You're doing fine. [She moves to help another student.]

Peter: Miss Dice. Miss Dice. Miss Dice. I stupid.

Teacher: Just a minute, just a minute. [Coming to Peter's desk] What? Your pictures? Are they glued on yet?

Peter: I stupid.

Teacher: Let's not talk about being stupid. You're a smart little boy. Good. Are you ready to do your pictures? Good [as Peter picks up his pencil].

Student: Peter, you're not stupid.

Peter: Stupid.

Teacher: [To other students] Nah. He's just trying to get us going this morning, isn't he? Why don't you finish this sheet and do your journal so you can do the science experiment with the group. Do you want to do the science experiment?

Peter: Yeah.

Teacher: Good.

In a narrative clip, the teacher explained, "I think he felt a little lost, you know. He knew we were doing some things that he couldn't do. He knew he was basically out of place for a while." A part of the film from later in the school year illustrates how much more Peter was a part of classroom activities. The segment includes a classmate helping Peter as he stands in front of the class holding up a sentence strip for the class to read.

Student: OK, let's go. 1, 2, 3, Say 1, 2, 3. Peter?

Peter: 1, 2, 3.

Class: [Reading from the sentence strip as Peter faces them, holding it up.] I made a cake for dinner.

Peter: [Putting the strip on the floor, peering closely and pointing to words as he reads] I made a cake for dinner.

Teacher: [As the class applauds] Wow. Good job, Peter! [Peter smiles and moves to take his seat.]

Peter realized early in the year that he wasn't doing the same activities as the other children, and he recognized the hierarchical positioning this suggested. His teacher worked to understand

and respond to his literacy initiations, and Peter figured out how to engage in classroom activities in ways that he and others saw as productive. His teacher presumed Peter's competence, and Peter's enactments of literacy identities evolved in response.

Example 3: Terrance

Terrance (pseudonym) is a ninth-grader in a Reading Apprenticeship classroom, a young man about whom Cynthia Greenleaf and I have written elsewhere (Greenleaf & Hinchman, 2009). Terrance was identified for special education services as a learning disabled student when he was in elementary school. As you read his words, captured in an interview and think-aloud conducted by Cindy Litman, one of Greenleaf's colleagues, ask yourself: Who were Terrance's most important teachers? How have his enactments of literacy identities likely changed over time? What responsibilities does he seem to have assumed for his own literacy development?

> It actually was hard for me to like comprehend reading when I was like first and second grade because I couldn't understand any of what I was reading, but I knew that I was reading something. So now I like really understand what I'm reading since I practice like every night and all day, like reading on the internet and stuff, so now I really understand what I'm reading…
>
> Teachers and my momma and my friends and family helped me actually understand what I was reading… They got me to read books and stuff like that and my momma put me up in an afterschool program where they helped me read up in there, so I actually know how to read by my family and friends…
>
> A lot of it took place in school, too, because they got me in support classes where the teacher actually helps me with my work and projects and homework and stuff, so I do a lot of reading in there on the internet and do projects and she helped me read and understand everything like that.

Litman also asked Terrance to read and discuss a newspaper article. The article described a court case involving the American Civil Liberties Union defense of a group of high school students who had received permission to hold a peaceful anti-war protest only to have the principal withdraw her permission and suspend the student leaders. A portion of Terrance's interpretation follows:

> I just think the students are just trying to use their right to freedom of speech because they don't like the war and they're against the war. The students are having a anti-war rally and the principal don't like that. Well, the principal is using that freedom of speech too, as well, because she don't, she don't want the students to have the rally so she's actually telling them they can't have it. But the students are using theirs, too, in the same way, because they want to have the rally for the anti-war message.

Terrance came to see himself as a reader capable of completing sophisticated reading tasks; in other portions of the interview Terrance explains the many digital and print sources he reads each day. He was willing to tackle the reading and interpreting of a newspaper article on videotape, and he produced a reasonable initial interpretation.

Each of these individuals made progress because others responded to their desire for literacy. Susan's mother helped her learn to communicate through typing, Peter's teachers helped him to learn structures and practices that allowed his print literacy to emerge, and Terrance used scaffolded

and independent reading experiences to develop the ability to interpret sophisticated text. Presumed competence and instruction enabled them to extend their literacy identities, along with their hopes, dreams and aspirations, in new directions.

CONCLUSION

Who is responsible for the literacy identities of youth identified for special education? Sue, Peter, and Terrance would likely argue that, ultimately, they are. Even though my excerpts are limited representations, they hint of these individuals' pride regarding their literacy-related accomplishments. These accomplishments were enhanced when knowing others also assumed responsibility by presuming they were competent, despite their disabilities, and by exploring ways to enhance their literacy initiations.

Yet we know little about fostering such agency, about literacy identities that are or could be constructed by such individuals, or about how everyone would be shaped by these individuals in turn. Any one of these students might be ignored by most literacy researchers as not being representative enough for the purposive sampling of qualitative research, or because defining behaviors are not easily specified for the large-scale sampling of experimental or quasi-experimental design. Literacy researchers might also argue that development of these individuals' identities is the purview of special educators, although literature from this community seems not to have offered satisfying solutions to their needs either. Without clear guidance from research, extant intervention often uses commercial materials, resulting in indiscriminant programming that is unlikely to position young people favorably as citizens in the ways Susan's mom or Peter's or Terrance's teachers seem to have done.

As I also argued at the outset of this paper, members of the National Reading Conference can assume responsibility for addressing the literacy instructional concerns of young people identified for special education services. Publishing our work in mainstream outlets will, by itself, help other educators begin to include such individuals in their gaze. We can explore the literacy identities of such individuals in far more nuanced ways than are hinted in the video excerpts that I was able to include in this paper, and we can conduct other kinds of research to provide insights into competence and instruction. No one is better equipped than NRC members to explore such issues.

REFERENCES

Allington, R., & McGill-Franzen, A. (1989). School response to reading failure: Instruction for Chapter 1 and special education students in grades 2, 4, and 8. *Elementary School Journal, 89*, 529-542.

Allington, R., & Walmsley, S. (2007). *No quick fix, the RTI edition.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Alvermann, D. E. (2008). Why bother theorizing adolescents' online literacies for classroom practice and research. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 52*, 8-19.

Anzaldúa, G. (1999). *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza* (2nd. ed.). San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute.

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The dialogic imagination.* Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Biklen, D. (2005). *Autism and the myth of the person alone*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Blachman, B., & Tangel, D. (2008). *Road to reading.* Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing.

Blatt, B., & Kaplan, F. (1966). *Christmas in purgatory: A photographic essay on mental retardation.* New York, NY: Allyn and Bacon.

Bourdieu, P. (1992). *The logic of practice.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Chandler-Olcott, K., & Kluth, P. (2009). "Mother's voice was the main source of learning": Parents' role in supporting the literacy development of students with autism. *Journal of Literacy Research, 40,* 1-32.

Clay, M. (1966). *Emergent reading behavior.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Auckland, NZ.

Clay, M. (1993). *Reading recovery: A guidebook for teachers in training.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Colasent, R., & Griffith, P. L. (1998). Autism and literacy: Looking into the classroom with rabbit stories. *The Reading Teacher, 51*, 414–420.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2007, May 21). Evaluating "No Child Left Behind." *The Nation*. Retrieved March 3, 2010 from http://www.thenation.com/doc/20070521/darling-hammond.

Deshler, D. D., & Schumaker, J. B. (1988). An instructional model for teaching students how to learn. In J. L. Graden, J. E. Zins, & M. J. Curtis (Eds.), *Alternative educational delivery systems: Enhancing instructional options for all students* (pp. 391-411). Washington, DC: NASP.

Dickinson, D. K., McCabe, A., & Essex, M. J. (2006). A window of opportunity we must open to all: The case for preschool with high-quality support for language and literacy. In D. K. Dickinson & S. B. Neuman (Eds.), *Handbook of early literacy research* (Vol. 2, pp. 11-28). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Duffy, G., & Roehler, L. (1993). *Improving classroom reading instruction: A decision-making approach.* New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

Duffy, M. (2009, December). *Literacy instruction for students with moderate to severe cognitive disabilities: An analysis of parents' descriptions and perspectives.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Reading Conference, Albuquerque, NM.

Erickson, K. A., Clendon, S., Abraham, L., Roy, V., & Van de Carr, H. (2005). Toward positive literacy outcomes for students with significant developmental disabilities. *Assistive Technology Outcomes Benefits*, *2*, 45-54.

Farrell, M., & Elkins, J. (1995). Literacy for all? The case of Down syndrome. *Journal of Reading*, *38*(4), 270–280.

Gee, J. P. (2001). Identity as an analytic lens for research in education. *Review of Research in Education, 25*, 99–125.

Gould, S. J. (1981). *The mismeasure of man.* New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company.

Greenleaf, C., & Hinchman, K. A. (2009). Reimaging our inexperienced adolescent readers: From struggling, striving, marginalized and reluctant to thriving. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, 53*, 4-13.

Harris, A. J., & Sipay, E. (1975). *How to increase reading ability: A guide to developmental and remedial methods* (6th ed.). Philadelphia, PA: David McKay Publishers.

Hartman, D. K., (2007). *One hundred years of reading research—1908-2008—From Edmund B. Huey to the present*. A research review address presented at the 57th Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference, Austin, TX.

Hinchman, K. A. (2008). Intervening when older youth struggle with reading: Teach me what I need to know next. In M. Conley (Ed.), *Meeting the challenge of adolescent literacy: Research we have and research we need* (pp. 11-35). New York, NY: Guilford.

Hinchman, K. A., & Michel, P. (1999). Reconciling polarity: Toward a responsive model of evaluating literacy performance. *The Reading Teacher, 52*, 578-587.

Hinchman, K. A., Payne-Bourcy, L., Thomas, H., & Chandler-Olcott, K. (2002). Representing adolescents' literacies: Case studies of three white males. *Reading Research and Instruction, 41,* 229-46.

Johnston, P. (2010). *RTI in literacy: Responsive and comprehensive.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Johnston, P., & Allington, R. L. (1991). Remediation. In R. Barr, P. Mosenthal, M. Kamil, & P. D. Pearson (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research* (pp. 984-1012). New York, NY: Longman.

Katims, D. S. (2000). Literacy instruction for people with mental retardation: Historical highlights and contemporary analysis. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation & Developmental Disabilities, 35*, 3-15.

Kliewer, C. (2008). Joining the literacy flow: Fostering symbol and written language learning in young children with significant developmental disabilities. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 33*, 103-121.

Kliewer, C. (1998). *Schooling children with Down syndrome*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Kliewer, C., & Biklen, D. (2007). Enacting literacy: Local understanding, significant disability, and a new frame for educational opportunity. *Teachers College Record, 109*, 2579–2600.

Kliewer, C., & Biklen, D. (2001). School's not really a place for reading: A research synthesis of the literate lives of children with severe disabilities. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 26*, 1–12.

Kliewer, C., Biklen, D., & Kasa-Hendrickson, C. (2006). Who may be literate? Disability and resistance to the cultural denial of competence. *American Educational Research Journal, 43*, 163–192.

Kliewer, C., Fitzgerald, L. M., Mayer-Mork, J., Hartman, P., English-Sand, P., & Raschke, D. (2004). Citizenship for all in the literate community: An ethnography of young children with significant disabilities in inclusive early childhood settings. *Harvard Educational Review*, *74,* 373–403.

Koppenhaver, D., & Erickson, K. (2003). Natural emergent literacy supports for preschoolers with autism and severe communication impairments. *Topics in Language Disorders, 23*(4), 283–292.

Lemons, C., & Fuchs, D. (2010). Modeling response to intervention in children with Down syndrome: An examination of predictors of differential growth. *Reading Research Quarterly, 45*, 134-168.

Leu, D. J., & Kinzer, C. K. (1995). *Effective reading instruction K-8.* Columbus, OH: Merrill Publishing.

Lewis, C., & delValle, A. (2009). Literacy and identity: Implications for research and practice. In L. Christianbury, R. Bomer, & P. Smagorinsky (Eds.), *Handbook of adolescent literacy research* (pp. 307-322). New York, NY: Guilford.

Lewis, C., Enciso, P., & Moje, E. (2007). *Reframing sociocultural research on literacy*. New York, NY: Erlbaum.

Lipson, M., & Wixson, K. (2009). *Response to intervention: Promises, possibilities, and potential problems for reading professionals.* Paper delivered at the annual meeting of the International Reading Association, Minneapolis, MN.

Lipson, M., & Wixson, K. (2010). *Successful approaches to rti: Collaborative practices for improving K-12 literacy.* Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

McCarthey, S. and Moje, E. B. (2002). Identity matters. *Reading Research Quarterly*, *37*, 228-237.

Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society: From the standpoint of a social behaviorist.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Mirenda, P. (2003). "He's not really a reader": Perspectives on supporting literacy development in individuals with autism. *Topics in Language Disorders, 23*(4), 270–281.

New London Group. (1996). A pedagogy of multiliteracies: designing social futures. *Harvard Educational Review, 66*, 60-92.

O'Brien, D. (2003, March). Juxtaposing traditional and intermedial literacies to redefine the competence of struggling adolescents. *Reading Online, 6*(7). Retrieved February 1, 2007, from http://www.readingonline.org/newliteracies/lit_index.asp?HREF=obrien2/

Pearson, P. D. (2009). *Teaching reading in a time of promise: What we can expect of the Obama years.* Paper delivered at the annual meeting of the International Reading Association, Minneapolis, MN.

Rhyner, P. (2009). Introduction. In P. Rhyner (Ed.), *Emergent literacy and language development: Promoting learning in early childhood.* New York, NY: Guilford.

Rubin, S., & Wurzburg, G. (2004). *Autism is a world.* Washington, DC: CNN Productions and State of the Art.

Schoenbach, R., Greenleaf, C., Cziko, C., & Hurwitz, L. (1999). *Reading for understanding: A guide to improving reading in middle and high school classrooms*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Siegel, M., Kontovourki, S., Schmier, S., & Enriquez, G. (2008). Literacy in motion: Case study of a shape-shifting kindergartener. *Language Arts, 86,* 89-98.

Smith, R., & Johnson, D. (1976). *Teaching children to read.* Reading, MA: Addison Wesley.

Snow, C., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Snow, C., Griffin, P., & Burns, M. S. (2005). *Knowledge to support the teaching of reading: Preparing teachers for a changing world.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Street, B. (1995). *Social literacies: Critical approaches to literacy development, ethnography, and education.* New York, NY: Addison Wesley.

Teale, William, & Sulzby, Elizabeth. (1986). *Emergent literacy: Writing and reading.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

United States Department of Education (USDE). (2004). *Building the legacy: IDEA 2004.* Washington DC: United States Department of Education. Retrieved March 1, 2010, from idea.ed.gov/

United States Department of Education (USDE). (2007). *History of educating children with disabilities through IDEA.* Washington, DC: United States Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs. Retrieved March 1, 2010, from www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/leg/idea/history.pdf.

Vellutino, F., & Scanlon, D. (2002). The interactive strategies approach to reading intervention. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 27,* 573-635.

Wurzburg, G. (1992). *Educating Peter.* Washington, DC: State of the Art.

Yell, M., Drasgow, E., & Lowry, K. A. (2005). No Child Left Behind and students with autism spectrum disorders. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disorders, 20*(3), 30–39.

Zenderland, L. (1998). *Measuring minds: Henry Herbert Goddard and the history of intelligence testing in the United States.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.