Positioning as a Mediator of Reader Self-Efficacy: A Case Study of Literature Circles

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Abstract

Literature circles are a socially supportive context in which students can cultivate their reader identities. This is especially promising for students with lower reader self-efficacies. This qualitative multiple case study explored the positioning practices of four Grades 5-6 students with comparatively low reader self-efficacy. In literature circles, the students responded to interactive positioning (i.e., positioning by others) and/or engaged in reflexive positioning (i.e., positioned themselves). Upon interpreting the data through positioning theory, two storylines emerged. In the first storyline, students reflexively positioned themselves in literature circles as strategic, engaged readers, thereby challenging initially lower reader self-efficacies. Yet the second storyline revealed that interactive positioning from peers and/or their teacher reinforced the peer statuses (i.e., academic plus social statuses) of three students. Findings indicate the students’ reader self-efficacies following literature circles were higher than initially reported. Thus, this study is significant in suggesting that positioning can mediate reader self-efficacy in peer-led literacy contexts such as literature circles. This further suggests students can challenge and (re)construct their identities, including their reader self-efficacies, as literature circle participants. Moreover, this study reveals a need for teachers to not only be aware of interactive positioning amongst students but also their own interactive positioning.

Keywords: Literature circles; reader self-efficacy; reflexive positioning; interactive positioning

Word count: 9,757 (abstract, body, table) or 11,184 (abstract, body, table, references)
Introduction

No single approach to teaching reading is effective for all students (Bond & Dykstra, 1967). Thus, a comprehensive approach to teaching reading is recommended. A comprehensive approach integrates explicit, systematic instruction of reading skills and strategies with activities that engage students in listening, speaking, reading, and writing for authentic, meaningful purposes (Vacca et al., 2018). Student choice of authentic texts and high-quality literature are central to a comprehensive approach to teaching reading (Vacca et al., 2018). Literature circles are one context that integrates listening, speaking, reading, and writing for the authentic purpose of discussing a text and facilitating meaning.

According to Certo et al. (2010), literature circles “invoke excitement about reading and discussing among students” (p. 256). A literature circle is a peer-led, text-based discussion group (Short & Pierce, 1998). Literature circle participation can potentially foster students’ socioemotional growth (Author, 2). Classroom discussions present opportunities for students to showcase their identities (Sosa, 2017). One such identity is a student’s reader self-efficacy. Although literature circle participation can potentially strengthen students’ reader self-efficacies (Author, 1; McElvain, 2010), positioning within this peer-led literacy context may also mediate reader self-efficacy.

In many ways, reader identity and reader self-efficacy intertwine. According to Wagner (2020), reader identity encompasses the ability to read and “beliefs about reading, language, and the self” (p. 3). Relatedly, reader self-efficacy refers to a person’s self-confidence as a reader. Together a child’s reader identity and reader self-efficacy may mediate their performance as a reader. Walgermo et al. (2018) stated, “As children progress through the school years, there seems to be a substantial correlation between the development of their interest, self-concept and
reading skill” (p. 91). Lower reader self-efficacy may influence a student’s text-based decision making (Hall, 2010). Reader self-efficacy thereby influences literacy achievement and consequently affords academic status (Matthews & Kesner, 2003), which coupled with social status, establishes peer status in a classroom (Cohen & Lotan, 1997). Peer status can mediate a child’s participation in cooperative learning groups (Lewis, 1997) such as literature circles.

Through positioning, students with low peer status may be susceptible to marginalization in literature circles (Clarke, 2006; Evans, 1996; Evans, 2002; Hall, 2016; Lewis, 1997; Möller, 2005; Peterson, 2016). Literature circles constitute a positioning practice (Frankel et al., 2018). Clarke (2006) explained, “the way we are continually positioned within a literature discussion contributes not only to how our literacy identity is shaped, but also to how we interact in future discussions” (pp. 55-56). Therefore, literature circles are a prime opportunity for positioning and storylines related to reader self-efficacy to develop.

Frankel and Fields (2019) asserted that prior research has mostly focused on “‘official’ classroom storylines [i.e., curriculum, instructional approaches, learning goals]” (p. 142) rather than student formulations of their own storylines (i.e., student’s literacy practices and identities). This study emerged to better understand student-created storylines in literature circles, specifically the ways in which readers are positioned with respect to the underlying tensions that affect positioning (Frankel, 2017). Since identity and positioning merge, one such tension underlying positioning in literacy contexts may be reader self-efficacy. This qualitative multiple case study explored how four Grades 5 and 6 students with comparatively low reader self-efficacy reflexively positioned themselves and/or responded to interactive positioning (i.e., positioning by others; Davies & Harré, 1990) in literature circles, a student-centered pedagogical structure. Such an understanding is important because positioning may negate not only their
participation in these literacy contexts but also influence their self-conceptions as readers. This study suggests that reader self-efficacy both shapes and is shaped by literature circles. Social cognitive theory and positioning theory are integral to the interpretation of data collected for this study.

**Theoretical Framework**

Social cognitive theory and positioning theory informed interpretation of the data. Below is an overview of each theoretical perspective and the relationship between them specific to reading.

**Social Cognitive Theory**

Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986) framed this study. Bandura (2001) proposed that humans are cognitive agents influenced, in part, by their own thoughts and beliefs such as self-efficacy. Thus, individuals self-assess the likelihood of their success based on their knowledge, experiences, and thoughts (Bandura, 1986). This self-assessment denotes the individual’s self-efficacy. *Self-efficacy* is one’s confidence in their ability to accomplish a specific task (Bandura, 1997). Four sources inform self-efficacy: (a) mastery experience; (b) vicarious experience; (c) feedback; and (d) physiological states (Pajares, 2003). Mastery experience, or the individual’s interpretation of their performance of the specific task, is the most influential source of self-efficacy (Pajares, 2003). However, two of the sources that inform self-efficacy stem from social interactions.

Vicarious experience refers to observing another accomplishing a specific task, which then triggers the observer to engage in social comparison (Lazarides & Warner, 2020). For example, Grade 4 student, Alex, may observe Cameron, a classmate, read a 300-page book. This vicarious experience prompts Alex to think, “If Cameron can read a huge book, then I can too!”
The source that informs self-efficacy directly derived from social interaction is feedback. Students receive feedback from teachers, peers, family members, school administrators and/or personnel. Returning to the previous example, Alex’s confidence to read a 300-page book may be boosted by verbal encouragement from Alex’s English Language Arts teacher. In providing this feedback, the teacher has not only influenced Alex’s reader self-efficacy but also interactively positioned Alex as a capable reader. Relatedly, positioning theory also informed this study.

**Positioning Theory**

Through positioning, permission is granted regarding group membership, roles, and even speaking (Holland et al., 1998). According to Harré et al. (2009),

In short, Positioning theory looks at what a person ‘may do and may not do’…Positions are clusters or beliefs about how rights and duties are distributed in the course of an episode of personal interaction and the taken-for-granted practices in which most of these beliefs are concretely realized (p. 9).

Positioning theory is concerned with the roles one assumes and assigns to others (Harré & Van Langenhove, 1999). Positioning can be reflexive, interactive, or imparted.

Positioning occurs in three ways by: (a) *reflexive positioning* or positioning the self; (b) *interactive positioning* or being positioned by others; or (c) positioning others (Davies & Harré, 1990). As a person performs an action, dynamic rights and duties are ascribed (Harré et al., 2009). The local community then interprets the meaning of the action and collectively determines how it fits in a storyline (Harré et al., 2009). Bauer and Jiménez (2019) defined a *storyline* as “the group of commonly understood ways of thinking and behaving that develop over time as individuals in a particular setting engage in acts and position themselves and others” (p. 205). An individual projects a storyline through their actions while their social positions are
simultaneously recognized and assigned meaning by others (Leander, 2002). According to Wortham (2004),

Social identification is the process through which individuals and groups become identified as publicly recognized categories of people. This process requires two primary components: social categories of identity that circulate through time and space and the characteristics or behaviors of individuals that are interpreted with reference to those categories (p. 716).

In the classroom, a student’s storyline is created over time through events, interactions, and the attitudes and actions of peers and teachers towards the student (Worthy et al., 2012). Negative storylines, if left unchallenged, can result in labeling of the student and consequently, impede their academic and/or interpersonal growth (Worthy et al., 2012). Thus, one’s positions and/or storylines influence their identities.

Identity is a social construct created by an individual and evolving from recognition by others (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Moje et al., 2009). Holland and Leander (2004) wrote, “Positioning involves socially producing particular individuals and groups as culturally imagined types such that others and, even the person herself, at least temporarily, treat her as though she were such a person” (p. 130). As students interact, they begin to form identities within their respective classroom community. Students’ positions as readers influence their classroom identities.

**Reader Self-efficacy and Positioning Theory**

Matthews and Kesner (2003) equated literacy achievement with academic status. As academic status informs peer status (Cohen & Lotan, 1997), students with comparatively higher literacy achievement may benefit from not only high academic status but also high peer (social) status in the classroom. This connects to reader self-efficacy. Students with comparatively higher
academic status are likely to have mastery experiences related to academic performance and literacy achievement. These students are also likely to have positive observational comparisons or perceptions of their reading abilities compared to their peers. Moreover, students with comparatively higher academic status are likely to receive positive social feedback regarding their reading performance and/or achievement. These students are therefore likely to reflexively position themselves and be interactively positioned by others in a manner reflective of high reader self-efficacies. Thus, understanding positioning from the perspective of one’s identity as a reader is important.

Moje et al. (2009) asserted that a student’s identity as a “good reader or resistant reader” (p. 417) can influence their reflexive positioning and how they are interactively positioned. Moje et al. (2009) noted, “Identity labels can be used to stereotype, privilege, and marginalize readers and writers as ‘struggling’ or ‘proficient’” (p. 416). Holland and Leander (2004) argued that one’s use of “cultural resources and structures” (p. 131) can alter their social position. Thus, students may engage in literacy in social contexts if it is plausible for them to gain social and/or cultural capital (Hall, 2010; Moje et al., 2008; Worthy et al., 2012). The plausibility of renegotiating one’s reader identity speaks to the power of socially constructed literacy events such as literature circles and the positioning within them. Previous research has identified factors influencing positioning in literature circles. However, research into the connection between reader self-efficacy and literature circles is limited, which presents a need for this study.

**Review of Literature**

The cooperative and dialogic nature of literature circles necessitate more than literacy skills. A student must be able to not only articulate their thoughts about the text but also fully participate within the group’s social structure (Certo et al., 2010). Thus, literature circle
participation is contingent, in part, upon the student’s socioemotional characteristics (Author, 2). Interpersonal and group dynamics also play a role. Prior studies illuminated diverse factors influencing literature circle participation and positioning (Allen et al., 2003; Clarke, 2006; Evans, 1996; Hall, 2016; Lewis, 1997; Möller, 2005; Peterson, 2016), but thus far, reader self-efficacy has not been considered.

Factors Influencing Literature Circles

Scholars have studied factors that contribute to the quality of literature circles. Intrapersonal factors such as self-management in conjunction with interpersonal skills such as social awareness, social metacognition, and empathy play a role (Author, 2). Using multiple linear regression, Young and Mohr (2018) found that students’ quality verbal engagement in literature circles varied. According to Young and Mohr (2018), “Students who were more emotionally stable, described as secure and confident, provided more quality contributions” (pp. 52-53). Emotional stability potentially connects to reader self-efficacy, or a student’s self-confidence as a reader. Furthermore, Young and Mohr (2018) asserted that “Personality influences may differ with group dynamics or grade level” (p. 54). This relates to positioning within literature circles since personality can influence group dynamics as described below.

Positioning in Literature Circles

Literature circle participation, according to Certo et al. (2010), “teaches children” how to “build relationships with cultural groups known as readers” (p. 251). Simultaneously, a student’s reader identity informs their reflexive positioning and how their literature circle peers interactively position them (Allen et al., 2003). Several factors contribute to positioning in literature circles. Although students can negotiate their social positions in literature circles (Lewis, 1997), their peer group influences positioning (Evans, 1996). Age (Lewis, 1997), gender
(Clarke, 2006; Lewis, 1997), socioeconomic status (Clarke, 2006), perceptions of peer status (Evans, 1996), linguistic capital (Maloch, 2005), and perceptions of peer capability (Lewis, 1997; Möller, 2005) are factors that influence positioning in literature circles.

Previous studies explored interactive positioning in literature circles. Allen et al. (2003) studied two Grade 5 students across four discussion contexts, including student-led literature circles. The teacher sought to foster a safe and inclusive environment in which students could build relationships with each other while learning. Yet Allen et al. (2003) found that “the discussion groups struggled across social positions as readers—along the invisible lines that differentiated the ‘good’ from the ‘poor’ readers, the ‘slow’ from the ‘advanced,’” which resulted in focal students facing “silencing and abuse” (p. 246). In Clarke’s (2006) study, girls in Grade 5 silenced male literature circle members through interactive positioning. Evans’ (1996) study revealed that Grade 5 students often interrupted and/or ignored peers with comparatively low statuses. Möller’s (2005) research found that although peers initially viewed a Grade 4 student as less capable, literature circles provided a context for this student to receive and provide help to peers, which changed her reader self-perception.

Other studies focused on reflexive positioning in literature circles. Hall (2016) and Peterson (2016) found students reflexively positioned themselves as having power and subsequently interactively positioned their peers. Hall’s (2016) study revealed that in middle school text-based discussion groups, self-reported good readers engaged in disruptive talk by: “(a) attempt[ing] to silence another (b) interrupt[ing] a peer, or (c) devalu[ing] the ideas of another” (p. 76). Disruptive talk subsequently hindered the contributions of self-reported poor readers (Hall, 2016). Similarly, Peterson (2016) found that Grades 3–4 students reflexively positioned themselves through self-authoring in peer-led, literature-based discussions. Peterson
(2016) defined *self-authoring* as “claiming identity within literacy contexts...as a way to position oneself in relation to others and to gain status among group members” (p. 48). This research revealed that students’ interactive positioning of their peers is rooted in their reflexive positioning of themselves (Hall, 2016; Peterson, 2016), which is mediated, in part, by their reader identity.

**Reader Identity and Positioning**

Researchers uncovered a connection between reader identity and positioning. Hall (2010) studied three student-content area teacher dyads across Grades 6-8 to explore how they determined how to accomplish reading tasks. The students’ reader identities influenced their engagement. According to Hall (2010), the students sought “to prevent their peers, teachers, or family members from constructing a discursive identity of them as poor readers” and consequently sought to build capital as “good readers” (p. 1808). This student-held notion resulted in them seeking to acquire what Hall (2010) termed “the good reader identity” (p. 1808), yet this also meant that the students refused to participate in any reading task they felt would contribute to others conceiving of them as “poor readers” (p. 1808). The students resisted placing themselves at risk of conforming to stereotypes of poor readers. In this way, the students combatted stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Frankel and Fields (2019) studied the storylines and positioning that emerged during a Grade 7 student’s literacy tutoring sessions. Leo, the participant, enacted agency in three ways: (1) through self-authoring—discussing or enacting a vision for the individual’s future as a reader; (2) collaborative authoring with the tutor; or (3) offering an alternative storyline (Frankel & Fields, 2019). Leo’s reader identity mediated these acts of agency as Frankel and Fields (2019) described,
Leo’s deviations from Susan’s storyline were acts of agency that were mediated by his identity as a reader, write, and person, all of which were informed by his history-in-person and enacted self-understandings of himself as a reader and writer within and beyond the tutorial context, as well as by the positions available to him in that context. (p. 159).

As previously mentioned, reader self-efficacy is integral to a reader’s identity. Prior research has also examined reader self-efficacy in literature circles.

**Literature Circles and Reader Self-efficacy**

Reader self-efficacy is important because one’s self-efficacy, in part, determines motivation, engagement, effort, and persistence (Henk & Melnick, 1998). In a qualitative follow up study to their development of *The Reader Self-Perception Scale* (RSPS) (Henk & Melnick, 1995), Henk and Melnick (1998) interviewed children in Grades 4-6 with respect to their reader self-efficacies. The children based their assessment of their reader self-efficacies on (a) public performances such as word recognition, word analysis, and fluency; (b) teacher practices such as selecting students to call on; (c) personal and contextual affect; and (d) achievement (Henk & Melnick, 1998). According to Henk and Melnick (1998), affect was informed by the children’s personal understandings of the reading process and their “contextual observations of instructional emphases and practices that occur in the classroom” (p. 61). These contextual factors include grouping and social learning opportunities (Henk & Melnick, 1998), both of which are integral to literature circles.

Prior research uncovered a connection between literature circle participation and reader self-efficacy. McElvain (2010) studied emergent bilinguals in Grades 4-6 in Transactional Literature Circles (TLCs). Teachers reported observing an improvement in emergent bilinguals’ reader self-efficacies following participation in TLCs (McElvain, 2010). I studied Grades 4-6 students and likewise found improvement in their reader self-efficacies after participating in
literature circles (Author, 1). Previous research, however, has not yet examined how storylines that emerge from literature circles mediate reader self-efficacy, presenting a need for this study.

**Methods**

This study stems from a larger qualitative multiple case study of students with comparatively low reader self-efficacy as literature circle participants (Author, 1). The following research question guided my interpretation of the data: *How do students with low reader self-efficacy position themselves and/or respond to positioning while participating in literature circles?* According to Yin (2014), a case study “investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 16). In this study, literature circles in a Grades 4-6 classroom functioned as the real-world context. Stake (2006) wrote, “In multicase study research, the single case is of interest because it belongs to a particular collection of cases. The individual cases share a common characteristic or condition” (p. 4). The common thread between focal students (cases) in this study is a comparatively lower reader self-efficacy than their peers in Mrs. Ian’s (All names are pseudonyms.) classroom.

**Context and Participants**

This study occurred at a public school in the Southwestern region of the United States. The school serves students in Pre-K 3 to Grade 8. According to Public Education Information Management System data, school student demographics reflected a 3% biracial, 5% Black, 65% Latinx, and 17% White racial and ethnic composition. Approximately 75% of students qualified for free or reduced lunch, 9% participated in the English as a Second Language program, 10% in the Gifted/Talented program, and 6% received special education services. Mrs. Ian’s Grades 4-6 dual English Language Arts/Social Studies classroom functioned as the specific site of this study.
After obtaining Institutional Review Board approval, I administered an unaltered version of The Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) (Henk & Melnick, 1995) to all 20 students in Mrs. Ian’s class. The RSPS measures the reader self-efficacies of students in Grades 4-6 (Henk & Melnick, 1995). Using purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2013), I studied those students with low reader self-efficacies relative to their classmates. Similarly, Hall (2016) administered the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, Fourth Edition (GMRT-4) to get a sense of study participants as readers. Henk and Melnick (1995) asserted that the RSPS allows teachers to “gain a sense of how the general classroom climate affects children’s self-efficacy judgements in reading” (p. 474). For data specific to the RSPS see (Author, 1). Two Grade 5 students—Humberto (Latinx male) and Naomi (Black female)—are focal students in this study along with two Grade 6 students—Tomás (Latinx male) and Will (White male). Each student spoke English fluently.

Over eight weeks, the 20 students in Mrs. Ian’s class met once a week in literature circles to discuss the novel Rules (Lord, 2008). The novel follows a 12-year-old protagonist and younger sibling with autism spectrum disorder (Lord, 2008). Informed by Daniels (2002), Mrs. Ian assigned one of six literature circle roles to each student: (a) Artful Artist; (b) Connector; (c) Discussion Director; (d) Literacy Luminary; (e) Summarizer; or (f) Word Wizard. The Discussion Director invariably led the literature circle by posing discussion questions. The use of these roles is explored further in the Discussion section of this manuscript. Each student completed a role sheet as evidence of their preparation.

Since all students read the same novel, Mrs. Ian changed the composition of each literature circle from week to week. Mrs. Ian shared her motivation behind this dynamic grouping as encouraging her students to work hard and “giv[ing] them the opportunity to talk to people that they normally don’t talk to in class” to learn that everyone has “value” (personal
interview). Each literature circle was heterogeneous in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, grade level, and reader self-efficacy as measured by the RSPS (Henk & Melnick, 1995). The four focal students intermingled with their peers in literature circles.

Data Collection

I began visiting Mrs. Ian’s classroom in September to build rapport with the students. I then administered the RSPS (Henk & Melnick, 1995) and conferred with Mrs. Ian to identify focal students. In October, I interviewed each focal student individually; all interviews were audio-recorded for accuracy (Yin, 2014). Informed by Creswell (2013), I utilized an open-ended observational protocol to avoid limiting this potentially rich source of data. Stake (2006) stressed the importance of observation: “The most meaningful data-gathering methods are often observational—both direct observation and learning from the observations of others” (p. 4). The observed literature circles occurred from November to January. I assumed the role of participant observer (Creswell, 2013) to fully interact with the students. On the continuum of participant observation, I adopted a “researcher role more visible” stance (Guest et al., 2013, p. 89). I sought to simply observe the literature circles, but as described later, I did intervene at times to provide clarification and/or correction (see Humberto, Literature Circle #4 and Naomi, Literature Circle #7). I visited each literature circle as they met and recorded my observations of the focal students. In February, I interviewed Mrs. Ian and again interviewed each focal student individually. I conducted a focus group with three of the focal students present. (Mrs. Ian prohibited Tomás’ participation in the focus group.) Finally, I administered the RSPS as a post-test to all 20 students.

Data Analysis
A multiple case study necessitates within- and cross-case analysis (Yin, 2014). For within-case analysis, I analyzed each case as if it were a separate study (Yin, 2014). Following Creswell and Poth’s (2017) data analysis spiral, I first organized each focal student’s data using qualitative data analysis software. As I read the data in its entirety, I wrote analytic memos (Saldaña, 2021) for synthesis. Inductive coding (Miles et al., 2020) allowed me to identify patterns in the data before imposing a theoretical framework. I created codes to “assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled” (Miles et al., 2020, p. 62).

Initially, I coded data as follows: (a) positive interaction with other(s); (b) negative interaction with other(s); (c) positive self-conception; (d) negative self-conception; (e) demonstrated reader self-efficacy. After applying the theoretical framework, those codes became: (a) affirming interactive positioning; (b) marginalizing interactive positioning; (c) positive reflexive positioning; (d) marginalizing reflexive positioning. Following coding, I constructed narrative descriptions, or my interpretations of the data (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This aligns with Davies and Harré’s (1990) notion that positioning is rooted in coauthored storylines. Miles et al. (2020) argued, “The storyline function of narrative enables the researcher to outline the plot points of human action and how participants (or “characters”) changed throughout the course of the study” (p. 83). To facilitate cross-case analysis, I created Table 1 to display data visually and uniformly (Yin, 2014). Cross-case analysis allows for making assertions about the data (Stake, 2006). I established trustworthiness in several ways.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified five factors contributing to the trustworthiness of qualitative data analysis: (a) credibility (b) dependability (c) transferability (d) confirmability and (e) reflexivity. Triangulation between multiple data sources contributes to the credibility of findings (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Nowell et al. (2017), an audit
trail “provides readers with evidence of the decisions and choices made by the researcher regarding theoretical and methodological issues” (p. 3), which enhances dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged work in the field, audio-recorded data (where applicable), use of qualitative data analysis software, and cross-case data analysis also established credibility and dependability (Certo et al., 2010). Thick, rich description of contextual factors, participants, and research process lends itself to transferability (Merriam, 1988). Together, credibility, transferability, and dependability establish confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Clarifying researcher bias (addressed in the Limitations) creates reflexivity (Merriam, 1988). In terms of positionality, as a researcher I favor sociocultural approaches to literacy and am especially interested in student-centered pedagogical approaches. Below are the findings from this study.

Findings

Two storylines emerged from cross-case analysis. The first storyline revealed reflexive positioning by the four focal students to demonstrate their reader self-efficacies. The second storyline revealed interactive positioning from peers and/or Mrs. Ian reinforced the peer statuses of three focal students. The two storylines intertwine therefore both are interwoven into the findings, which mirrors Clarke (2006) who described participants’ conversations prior to “investigat[ing] the context” (p. 64) for positioning. Findings are visually represented in Table 1 along with the role assigned to each focal student for each literature circle in keeping with qualitative data analysis (Yin, 2014). Students reflected on their experience during Literature Circle #8 and did not have a role.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

Findings are presented in alphabetical order by focal student and chronological order of literature circle meetings. These findings meld together several data sources: (a) narrative descriptions
based on my observations; (b) direct quotes from focal students as they interacted in literature circles; (c) direct quotes from interviews with each focal student; (d) direct quotes from Mrs. Ian’s interview; and (e) direct quotes from the focus group. I indicated the respective data source to demonstrate how I drew from each in presenting the findings below. Role sheets are mentioned where appropriate in the findings, which begin with Humberto.

**Humberto**

Prior to literature circles, Humberto often worked alone even when Mrs. Ian permitted collaboration. I observed Humberto’s peers make rude comments to and/or about him. This suggested that Humberto held low social status—one of two factors contributing to peer status—in Mrs. Ian’s class. Humberto participated eagerly in Literature Circle #1 and, by demonstrating strategic reading, reflexively positioned himself as having academic status. Simultaneously, Humberto’s peers interactively positioned him as having low social status. Visibly proud of his illustration, Humberto drew a scene seminal to the chapter accompanied by a direct quote. Yet, “The Discussion Director would pose a question, and Humberto would begin to answer, but [a peer] would interrupt him and offer her answers” (observation notes).

Humberto continued reflexively positioning himself as having academic status in the next two literature circles. As Discussion Director for Literature Circle #2, Humberto asked follow-up questions and sought to extend the conversation. Humberto encouraged literature circle members to support their assertions with evidence from the text. During Literature Circle #3, Humberto diverged from his literature circle’s seemingly collective thinking about the novel. This demonstrated the depth of his reading comprehension. Yet Naomi interactively positioned Humberto by asking, “Did you read the story? Then you should know” (direct quote, observation). For Literature Circle #4, Humberto was Discussion Director.
Out of frustration, Humberto said, ‘No one even cares about their jobs [i.e., literature circle roles]’ (direct quote, observation). Humberto requested an answer from and gave [an] opportunity for each student to answer. He was shut down by one student until I joined the group… When I arrived to his group, he was clearly frustrated. Though he did not prepare for his role, he wanted to participate and lead as Discussion Director. However, a [peer] told him that he could not use Mrs. Ian’s box of questions. I corrected this student, and Humberto was happy to begin his role as Discussion Director (observation notes).

Humberto’s peers interactively positioned him as having low social status. However, Humberto again reflexively positioned himself as having academic status as Discussion Director of Literature Circle #6. He solicited discussion contributions, listened respectfully, and encouraged literature circle members to further explain by asking “Why?” (direct quote, observation) and other follow up questions.

Yet interactive positioning of Humberto continued. During Literature Circle #7, Humberto’s peers physically left the meeting space while he completed related work. A student receiving special education services participated in literature circles for the first time during Literature Circle #8.

[Humberto’s] group members did not give him an opportunity to share. [They] skipped him for [the student receiving special education services.] Humberto’s group members seemed to exclude him. [Humberto] interjected a couple of times that he was ready to share, but the group was more interested in hearing what [the student receiving special education services] had to share (observation notes).

Notably, Humberto’s peers included the student receiving special education services by carefully listening to this student’s contributions. Yet they ignored Humberto despite his expressed desire to converse.

Interactive positioning of Humberto continued in the focus group as evident in the snippets below.

**Me:** What characteristics of literature circles did you like the least, if any? Why?

**Will:** I don’t like being in Humberto’s group. I try to avoid him (direct quotes, focus group).
Notably, Will and Humberto were only grouped together for Literature Circle #5. Later, I asked:

**Me:** Would you like to participate in a literature circle again? Why or why not?

**Will:** I try to avoid certain people [implying Humberto by glancing at him] (direct quotes, focus group).

Will’s interactive positioning of Humberto continued later in the focus group.

**Me:** Did participating in a literature circle change your perspective on how open you can be with your feelings in class? If yes, in what ways? If not, why not?

**Will:** Not even close.

**Me:** Not even close? Why do you say that?

**Will:** Because I still try to avoid certain people [implying Humberto by glancing at him] (direct quotes, focus group).

Towards the conclusion of the focus group, I asked:

**Me:** What are some ways that teachers can help you better enjoy reading?

**Humberto:** “Let us buy our own books” (direct quotes, focus group).

Others responded that books could be expensive. Humberto added that the local grocery store sold affordable books, which Will repeatedly contested although I confirmed Humberto’s assertion. On four separate occasions during the focus group, Will stated he tried to avoid Humberto.

Humberto’s participation in Literature Circles #1, #2, #3, and #6 aligned with Storyline 1 in that Humberto challenged his reader identity by reflexively positioning himself as having academic status. However, Humberto’s experiences in Literature Circles #1, #3, #4, #7, and #8 reflected Storyline 2. Before literature circles, Humberto stated he enjoyed reading “in groups or when I’m like reading to somebody” (personal interview). Despite Humberto exhibiting strategic reading, his peers interactively positioned him in a manner that reinforced his comparatively low
social status. Consequently, Humberto voiced frustration with his peers in the latter half of literature circles. Mrs. Ian noted:

I think for [Humberto] it had a lot to do with who he was comfortable with. The students that he was working with—they had a lot to do with how he felt about literature circles. I think they had a bigger influence on [Humberto] than even the literature circles or even the book we were reading (personal interview).

Mrs. Ian seemed aware of how interactive positioning during literature circles appeared to affect Humberto.

Naomi

Naomi was a Gifted/Talented student. Mrs. Ian described Naomi as a strategic reader albeit one who does not enjoy reading. As the Discussion Director for Literature Circle #1, Naomi asked questions that required deeper thinking about the text. In this way, Naomi reflexively positioned herself as having academic status. However, in Literature Circle #2, Naomi reflexively positioned herself as disengaged. I noted:

[Naomi] hurried [a peer] to share [their] role as Literacy Luminary. Naomi seemed disinterested in the literature circle. [Naomi] chose several words [as Word Wizard], but she did not share them with the group. Rather, a peer shared her words with the group. Several group members made predictions…I asked Naomi if she shared that prediction to which she responded, ‘Sure’ (direct quote, observation). … She did not seem to want to participate and spent most of the time playing around with a peer. [Her literature circle members] were left simply observing Naomi and her friend (observation notes).

Naomi’s engagement level changed during Literature Circle #4 when she was again Discussion Director.

Naomi seemed most receptive to literature circles as the Discussion Director and disengaged when not. Naomi, Humberto, Will, and another peer met during Literature Circle #5. [Naomi] told me, ‘I don’t like this group—it’s too much’ (direct quote, observation). Naomi seemed frustrated that the group asked her to do two jobs and was disorganized…The dynamic between Naomi and Will was interesting. Will demanded that [Naomi] participate in the group by calling on her to answer questions without relenting and despite her resistance (observation notes).
Naomi vocalized disdain for literature circles at this time. As the Discussion Director, Will refused to allow Naomi to disengage from the literature circle, which Naomi disliked. Disengagement continued in Literature Circle #6 through Naomi’s minimal discussion contributions. Naomi recognized she did not fulfill her Summarizer role but excused her effort by asserting that she had the student teacher’s permission.

For Literature Circle #7, I (unintentionally) interactively positioned Naomi in a way that challenged her academic status. Although Discussion Director, Naomi participated minimally. I called attention to her lack of preparation.

[Naomi] chose the question, “Finish this sentence in 3 different ways.” When I asked her, “What is your sentence?” (direct quote, observation), she said, “[The discussion card] didn’t have one” (direct quote, observation). She then grabbed the box of questions to see if she could find the question (observation notes).

Through this exchange, I (upon reflection realized) I challenged Naomi’s academic status through interactive positioning. This seemed to upset Naomi, and whereas she actively participated as Discussion Director during Literature Circles #2 and #4, she limited participation in Literature Circle #7. Naomi outright refused to participate in Literature Circle #8. Instead, a peer read Naomi’s reflection on her behalf. Thus, in Literature Circles #7 and #8, Naomi reflexively positioned herself as disengaged.

Arguably due to her high peer status, Mrs. Ian seemed unaware of Naomi’s reluctance to participate in literature circles.

At first [Naomi would say,] 'I don't know if I wanna do this.' But I think it was like two or three meetings in, she stopped. [Naomi] really looked like she was enjoying [literature circles]. As a student, I think that collaborative piece—participating with lots of different students—I think that made her more open and willing (personal interview).

Mrs. Ian continued by stating, “I think it helped [Naomi] to realize that there are lots of things we can read, and there are lots of ways we can look at reading” (personal interview). Thus, Mrs. Ian seemed to believe literature circles eased some of Naomi’s reluctance towards reading.
Tomás

Before literature circles Mrs. Ian described Tomás as “reluctant, struggling…everything. With Tomás before it was, ‘Why do I have to read?’” (personal interview). Tomás hinted to me that he was interactively positioned in Mrs. Ian’s class as troublesome. Tomás described literature circles as “when like everybody’s in a group and ha[s] a book that you read and ha[s] a job, and you do your job, and if you don’t do a good job then you do all of the jobs by yourself” [emphasis added by the researcher] (personal interview). Tomás’ quote struck me because only he described literature circles in this way. Prior to and during literature circles, I observed Tomás being isolated from his peers at times. As a literature circle participant, Tomás challenged this identity.

Tomás reflexively positioned himself with academic status during Literature Circle #1 through active participation and demonstration of reading comprehension.

Tomás was engaged during his literature circle meeting. Tomás does not get to work with his peers sometimes because he is in trouble. Tomás seemed to enjoy meeting with his literature circle. Through Tomás’ responses, he showed an understanding of the chapter and seemed to enjoy the book. His big idea also briefly summarized the chapter (observation notes).

Tomás was not allowed to participate in Literature Circle #2, which is indicative of his interactive positioning as a troublemaker.

Tomás eagerly participated as the Artful Artist in Literature Circle #3 and illustrated a pivotal event in the chapter. In this way, Tomás reflexively positioned himself as having academic status by demonstrating reading comprehension through his illustration. Tomás was prevented from participating in Literature Circle #4. Despite wanting to participate, Mrs. Ian interactively positioned Tomás by isolating him from his peers. Tomás’ peers positioned him similarly.
At times, Tomás’ peers interactively positioned him as having challenging behavior.

During Literature Circle #5:

Another student told [Tomás] that he wasn’t in the group because [Tomás] didn’t finish [the role sheet.] Tomás responded by saying, “That’s a big lie” (direct quote, observation). Although Tomás did not prepare a role sheet for his literature circle, he wanted to participate in the group. Tomás is often typecast as a troublemaker and can be isolated from his peers at times as a consequence. [Tomás] seems to enjoy peer interaction when given the opportunity… Though his immediate answers to questions were ‘I don’t know’ (direct quote, observation notes), [Tomás] would elaborate [on his responses] upon hearing his peers’ responses and having more think time (observation notes).

While his peers met for Literature Circle #6, Tomás prepared his role sheet and asked if he could be in a literature circle with Mrs. Ian (who denied this request.) This was notable because although unprepared for Literature Circle #4, Mrs. Ian allowed Humberto to participate. This suggests that a behavioral consequence precluded Tomás’ Literature Circle #6 participation. Moreover, Mrs. Ian allowed Tomás to participate in Literature Circles #5 and #7 despite his lack of preparation. Even so, Tomás’ reflexive positioning continued to contrast peers’ and Mrs. Ian’s interactive positioning of him.

Tomás worked on his role sheet during Literature Circle #7, but his contributions indicated he read the novel. Again, Tomás’ reflexively positioned himself as having academic status. Similarly, Tomás worked diligently while his peers discussed during Literature Circle #8. This reflexive positioning continued post-literature circles. Tomás informed me, “I used to not like reading, and I used to be bad at reading. But now I like to read, and it’s better for you” (personal interview). During literature circles, Mrs. Ian observed, “[Tomás] actually had a lot of good things to add. [Tomás realized,] ‘Oh! Well, I do have something of value to add’” (personal interview). Following literature circles, Mrs. Ian noted, “[Tomás] wants to read his book over and over and over again, which is a huge difference in him” (personal interview).
In addition to being excluded from Literature Circles #2, #4, and #6, Mrs. Ian precluded Tomás from focus group participation. Yet Will interactively positioned Tomás as troublesome as evident in the snippets below.

**Me:** What'd you like the most about—was there something that you liked the most about literature circles?

[Several students responded.]

**Me:** Will, did you have something that you liked the most about literature circles?

**Will:** Yes and no.

**Me:** Okay, so what did you—well, we're going to get to what you liked the least after this, but what did you like the most about it?

**Will:** Umm... [everyone laughs] Word Wizard was like a 30-minute job so.

**Me:** So that took too long?

[Another student]: To me, Word Wizard took like 10 minutes.

**Will:** It was only too long because people kept messing with me like Tomás.

**Me:** Okay, Tomás kept messing with you.

**Will:** For real (direct quotes, focus group).

Paradoxically, Will had copied Tomás’ role sheet for Literature Circle #3. Perhaps to cover his own embarrassment, Will used Tomás’ peer status as a troublemaker to his own advantage.

**Will**

In the initial literature circles, Will reflexively positioned himself as disengaged. During Literature Circle #1:

Will seemed more interested in quickly finishing [the] role sheet so that he could use the computer. [Will] stated that he couldn’t find any interesting words [for the Word Wizard role]. Mrs. Ian helped him to identify words in the chapter. Another student asked, ‘You really don’t care, do you, Will?’ (direct quote, observation notes). [The Discussion Director asked,] ‘What emotions did you feel while reading?’ (direct quote, observation
notes). [Will responded] that he felt bored because he doesn’t like to read (observation notes).

Will repeatedly wrote ‘IDK’ (i.e., “I don’t know”) (direct quote, documentation) on his Literature Circle #2 role sheet. He goofed around and distracted other literature circle members. Will completed more of his Literature Circle #3 role sheet but under Mrs. Ian’s supervision and copied Tomás’ illustration. Will told Mrs. Ian, “But I hate reading” (direct quote, observation notes)—a sentiment echoed as his response regardless of the question asked during Literature Circle #4. In the latter literature circles, Will’s reflexive positioning began to change.

As the Discussion Director for Literature Circle #5, Will did not vocalize displeasure for reading. Instead, Will reflexively positioned himself as having academic status.

I came to Will’s group late, but for once I did not hear him remark that he hates reading! Will asked a thought-provoking question, but his group did not know how to respond. [Will] answered his own questions with depth. He demanded (though persistence) that each member answer each question posed. He was especially persistent with Naomi, who was a reluctant participant (observation notes).

Although not the Discussion Director, Will reflexively positioned themself as leader of Literature Circle #6. In Literature Circle #7 Will again reflexively positioned himself as having academic status by demonstrating strategic reading. His contributions indicated that he read and comprehended the novel. Mrs. Ian, too, noted a difference in Will’s reflexive positioning as a literature circle participant, “At first [Will] was showing a lot of resist—reluctance. Towards the end, he really putting forth an effort to get it done. I can say I’ve noticed some differences” (personal interview).

**Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melnick, 1995) results**

Statistically significant results between the focal participants’ Reader Self-Perception Scale (Henk & Melinck, 1995) pre-test (i.e., prior to participating in literature circles) and post-
test (i.e., after participating in literature circles) scores may be found in Author (1). Here, I present limited data from the RSPS (Henk & Melnick, 1995). In response to the “I think I am a good reader” statement on the RSPS (Henk & Melnick, 1995), Humberto selected “agree” on the pre-test but “undecided” on the post-test (documentation). Naomi selected “agree” on both pre-test and post-test in response to the same statement (documentation). Tomás selected “disagree” on the pre-test but changed his selection to “agree” on the post-test (documentation). Will’s initial selection of “undecided” remained unchanged on the post-test (documentation).

Quantitatively, Humberto’s score on the RSPS (Henk & Melnick, 1995) increased from pre-test to post-test as did Naomi’s, Tomás’, and Will’s (Author, 1). Prior to discussing these findings, I present study limitations below.

**Limitations**

The dynamic composition of literature circles in Mrs. Ian’s classroom each week may have influenced students’ positioning. Thus, these findings may not emerge when literature circle composition is more static. Albeit some focal students were interactively positioned in a similar manner each week despite being grouped with different peers. Additionally, the narrative descriptions presented in this paper are informed by positioning theory, but ultimately, are drawn from my own interpretations. However, Evans (2002) identified that prior research concerning students’ perceptions of literature circles are often interpreted by the researcher(s) or teacher. Furthermore, the narrative descriptions are supported by data presented from other sources, including personal interviews, the focus group, and documentation (i.e., role sheets and RSPS pre- and post-test results). Thus, researcher bias is plausible although I sought to limit this through data triangulation and by presenting contrasting data. For example, Mrs. Ian’s observations of Naomi’s literature circle participation contrasted my own. Finally, as a
participant observer, there were times that I, too, interactively positioned students (see Humberto, Literature Circle #4 and Naomi, Literature Circle #7). These limitations, however, do not detract from the significance of this study.

Discussion

In literature circles, students with lower reader self-efficacies can challenge these reader identities. However, interactive positioning from their peers and/or teacher can simultaneously reinforce their peer status.

**Storyline 1: Demonstrating Reader Self-efficacy through Reflexive Positioning**

Literacy achievement and academic status are synonymous (Matthews & Kesner, 2003). Reader self-efficacy informs literacy achievement (Corkett et al., 2011; Solheim, 2011). Grades 4-6 students, such as those in this study, often disconnect their reader self-efficacies from their literacy achievement (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). Thus, although a student may achieve academically, they may self-report a lower reader self-efficacy. Relatedly, Humberto’s and Naomi’s initial reader self-efficacies contrasted their academic achievement. Literature circles present an opportunity for students to transform low reader self-efficacy (Author, 1). Bomer and Laman (2004) argued,

> Students can shed deficit-based identities in peer-led, literacy contexts. In [this] pedagogical structure…students work in interaction with other students but somewhat independent of the teacher’s direction and most of the class’s scrutiny, and that affordance creates the possibility of multiple positionings even for the students usually constituted by the environment as ‘weak’ (pp. 452-453).

Reader self-efficacy can change in literature circles. Reader self-efficacy is informed by four constructs: (a) physiological; (b) observational comparison; (c) social feedback; and (d) progress (Henk & Melnick, 1995). Three of these constructs are present in literature circles. In literature
circles, students can easily compare their literacy with their peers (i.e., observational comparison), receive input from peers and/or teacher (i.e., social feedback), and demonstrate growth as a reader over time (i.e., progress).

Maloch (2005) argued that literature discussions present an opportunity for students to be recognized as learners in their classroom and thereby gain the cultural capital needed to change their identities. Each focal student reflexively positioned themselves in literature circles by demonstrating a higher reader self-efficacy than initially indicated on their RSPS (Henk & Melnick, 1995) pre-test results (Author, 1). Moreover, the actions of three focal students are indicative of their reflexive positioning as engaged, strategic readers. Humberto, Tomás, and Will actively contributed to literature discussions and demonstrated their comprehension of the novel. This suggests a disconnect between their initial reader self-efficacies and literacy achievement in the context of literature circles. Similarly, the focal participants in Maloch’s (2005) study gained recognition as competent classmates through their full participation in literature discussions. Yet three focal students faced interactive positioning from their peers and/or Mrs. Ian.

**Storyline 2: Interactive Positioning Reinforced Peer Status**

The interactive positioning of three focal students in this study—Humberto, Naomi, and Tomás—by their peers and Mrs. Ian varied. Consistently, however, the interactive positioning of these three focal students reinforced their peer status. This is noteworthy because, particularly in the cases of Humberto and Tomás, their peer status in Mrs. Ian’s classroom almost precluded their abilities to demonstrate their reader self-efficacies in ways that contrasted their initially lower RSPS (Henk & Melnick, 1995) scores.
Prior research is mixed regarding positioning of strategic readers in literature circles. Hall et al. (2011) suggested power is bestowed upon strategic readers who dominate text-based discussions. This contrasts how Humberto was interactively positioned and Naomi’s reflexive positioning although both held high academic status. Interactive positioning of Humberto aligned with research by Lewis (1997) who found literature circles may reinforce the differential status of students marginalized because of their social standing and Evans (1996) who found peers ignored and/or criticized those marginalized in literature discussions. Naomi, a focal student with high social status and academic status, reflexively positioned herself as disengaged through her refusal to participate in some literature circles. Naomi’s literature circle participation aligned with Lewis’ (1997) suggestion that students enact contradictory identities within the classroom. Due to her high peer status, Mrs. Ian afforded Naomi power through interactive positioning which Naomi exerted through reflexive positioning and interactive positioning of peers. Naomi’s peers—except Will—continually allowed her to disengage from literature circles due to her higher peer status. This too aligned with Lewis’ (1997) findings that high-status students are awarded power. Interactive positioning of Tomás by peers and Mrs. Ian situated him as troublesome. Mrs. Ian precluded Tomás’ participation in the three of the eight literature circles and the focus group. This aligned with prior research conducted by Leander (2002) and Sosa (2017) who observed English Language Arts teachers interactively positioning focal participants from deficit perspectives. Especially noteworthy is Mrs. Ian’s interactive positioning of students through the Discussion Director role.

**Discussion Director: Insights into Interactive Positioning**

Mrs. Ian interactively positioned the focal students through her assignment of Discussion Director. Mrs. Ian assigned this role to Humberto and Naomi three times each, once to Will, and
never to Tomás. As the de facto leaders of their literature circles, the Discussion Director role served as one mechanism for reinforcing the focal students’ peer statuses. This was especially evident when juxtaposing Naomi and Tomás.

Arguably influenced by her perception of Naomi as a “strong reader” and academic status as a Gifted/Talented student, Mrs. Ian assigned Discussion Director to Naomi three times. This echoes Christianakis (2010) who found teachers may reinforce the social status of high-achieving students by granting them power in peer-led groups. Teachers further bestow expert status on high-achieving students by repeatedly giving them additional responsibilities (Christianakis, 2010). Conversely, Mrs. Ian never assigned Tomás this role. This again connects to Christianakis’ (2010) study which suggested teachers may reinforce students’ social statuses—in this case Tomás’ social status as a troublemaker. The findings of this study contribute to the repertoire of studies on positioning in literacy contexts.

**Significance**

This study addresses a gap in the literature. Whereas prior research identified factors influencing positioning in literature circles, reader self-efficacy is notably absent as one. Three of the four constructs informing self-efficacy—observational comparison, social feedback, and progress—are present in literature circles. Thus, literature circles can both inform and transform (Author, 1) students’ reader self-efficacies. According to their initial RSPS (Henk & Melnick, 1995) scores, each focal student had a lower reader self-efficacy compared to their peers. However, each focal student reflexively positioned themselves in a manner that demonstrated higher reader self-efficacy in literature circles (Storyline 1). The focal students’ literature circle participation revealed their self-conceptions as readers were stronger than their RSPS pre-test results initially indicated. This speaks to the constructs of observational comparison and progress
as readers over the course of literature circles—two of the constructs that inform self-efficacy. Positioning in literature circles also revealed insights into the power dynamics of Mrs. Ian’s classroom.

According to Clarke (2006), literature circles “illuminate how power is locally achieved” (p. 77). Relatedly, each focal student exercised individual agency by reflexively positioning themselves as strategic readers despite their comparatively lower initial reader self-efficacies. Sosa (2017) wrote, “Individuals have agency in how they position themselves and self-identify in social contexts” (p. 35) but acknowledged that interactional spaces are governed by social norms. According to Bucholtz and Hall (2005), “Agency may be ascribed through the perceptions and representations of others” (pp. 606-607). In this way, the interactive positioning of the focal students by peers and/or Mrs. Ian is indicative of the power exerted to reinforce each focal student’s peer status in the classroom. Thus, the third construct of reader self-efficacy—social feedback—from peers and Mrs. Ian contributed to the interactive positioning of three focal students.

Interactive positioning affected three of the four focal students albeit in varied ways. Although this interactive positioning did not influence their post-literature circle reader self-efficacies (Author, 1), it did reinforce their peer statuses in Mrs. Ian’s classroom (Storyline 2). Interestingly, the Discussion Director role functioned as one way in which Mrs. Ian interactively positioned her students. Teachers play a primary role in shaping students’ identities (Lewis, 1997), and their instructional decisions may perpetuate students’ social hierarchies (Zacher, 2008). Through her assignment of the Discussion Director role, Mrs. Ian reinforced Naomi’s high peer status and contributed to Tomás’ peer status as a troublemaker. This speaks to the implications of this study.
Implications

One implication of this study is its revelation that literature circles are a context for the mediation of reader self-efficacy. In this study, students with comparatively lower initial reader self-efficacies exercised individual agency by reflexively positioning themselves to demonstrate their reader self-efficacy. They accomplished this by demonstrating strategic reading as literature circle participants. Literature circles provide an opportunity for students with lower reader self-efficacies to “work out” their reader identities through an authentic and meaningful literacy event. This is especially important for Grades 4-6 students whose reader self-efficacies often do not correlate with their literacy achievement (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2003). Grades 4-6 students thereby are particularly susceptible to believing that they’re less capable as readers than their achievement/performance suggests. To combat this, Grades 4-6 teachers can integrate literature circles in their classrooms.

However, teachers must be cognizant of power dynamics in their classrooms, which can come to light in literature circles. As this study found, positioning in literature circles can potentially preclude students’ abilities to demonstrate their reader self-efficacies. Teachers might be largely unaware of students’ positioning of each other (Zacher, 2008). Allen et al. (2003) argued, “When peer support is lacking, the teacher has the responsibility to enable students to adopt productive stances in literature discussions and interrupt destructive social and discursive practices” (p. 225). Young and Mohr (2018) suggested teachers strategically configure groups with respect to students’ personalities. Henk and Melnick (1998) suggested teachers consider their students’ reader self-efficacies when orchestrating their classroom environment. Observing literature discussions may help teachers attend to the social dynamics of each group to meet all students’ needs (Möller, 2005).
Teachers must also be conscientious of how they (un)intentionally interactively position their students. Daniels (2002) introduced roles such as Discussion Director as a scaffold for students transitioning into literature circles. Yet Short and Pierce (1998) cautioned against roles: “The competence of each learner is enhanced when roles and responsibilities within a classroom remain more fluid instead of being fixed formal roles with boundaries and territories to defend…” (p. 43). One alternative for teachers seeking some form of accountability in literature circles might be to have each student complete a discussion preparation guide or respond to the text in a manner of their choosing.

Finally, teachers must be conscientious of their expectations of their students and how this affects student performance and self-beliefs. Teacher expectancy refers a teacher’s inferred anticipation of future student performance (López, 2017). Teacher expectancy can influence student outcomes and student self-beliefs such as self-efficacy (López, 2017). In a quantitative study, López (2017) found that critical awareness can mediate teacher expectancy. Critical awareness refers to a teacher’s understanding of the often-detrimental impact that sociohistorical influences have on traditionally marginalized students (López, 2017). Critically aware teachers adopt asset-based perspectives of their students, which can subsequently and positively affect student achievement outcomes and student self-beliefs. In the same vein, teachers can seek to “restory” (Worthy et al., 2012, p. 572) their students, particularly those with whom negative storylines are associated. Restorying necessitates a teacher believing that all their students are capable of academic and personal achievement regardless of students’ past achievement and/or behavior (Worthy et al., 2012). For restorying to occur, teachers must intentionally disrupt a student’s negative storylines (e.g., troublesome, low performing) through the curriculum, individualized teaching, and peer involvement in reidentifying the student.
Conclusion

This study addresses a gap in the literature by identifying another factor that contributes to the success of peer-led, text-based discussions such as literature circles: positioning as mediated by reader self-efficacy. Two complementary storylines emerged from this study. The first storyline revealed each focal student’s agency in reflexively positioning themselves in a way that demonstrated reader self-efficacy. However, the second storyline revealed that for three of the focal students, this reflexive positioning was met with interactive positioning from their peers and/or teacher in a manner that reinforced their peer statuses. This interactive positioning revealed the potential of positioning to preclude students from demonstrating their reader self-efficacies in student-centered pedagogical structures such as literature circles. Nevertheless, literature circles present an opportunity for students with low reader self-efficacy to challenge and/or (re)construct these identities.
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Author. (2)


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