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HOW RURAL UPPER ELEMENTARY FOURTH- AND FIFTH-GRADE STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITY VIEW THEIR READING IDENTITY

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HOW RURAL UPPER ELEMENTARY FOURTH- AND FIFTH-GRADE STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITY VIEW THEIR READING IDENTITY

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigates how rural fourth- and fifth-grade students with a Learning Disability (LD) perceive and construct their reading identities, and the contextual factors that shape these identities. Guided by a focus on student voice, the study moves beyond deficit-oriented perspectives to examine the lived experiences, motivations, and identity negotiations of struggling readers in rural settings. Three upper-elementary students participated in the study, and data were collected through surveys, semi-structured interviews, and participant-generated drawings depicting their reading experiences in and out of school. Findings reveal that reading identity for this population is highly context-dependent, influenced by interactions within home, school, and community environments. Students described reading as an emotional practice and expressed a desire for autonomy over what they read and where reading occurs. Rurality emerged as a significant factor, shaping access to reading materials, exposure to diverse literacy experiences, and opportunities for engagement. Teacher and family influence also played central roles in students' developing identities as readers. Implications for practice highlight the importance of creating supportive and emotionally responsive literacy environments, prioritizing student agency and choice, and addressing resource limitations common in rural communities. These findings contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of reading identity development among students with LD and offer recommendations for more equitable and contextually responsive literacy instruction.

Keywords: Reading identity, rurality, upper-elementary students, learning disability (LD), reading motivation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT vi

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 1

Background and Statement of Problem 1

Purpose of Proposed Study 3

Research Questions 4

Significance of Proposed Study 4

Organization of the Dissertation 5

Definition of Terms 7

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 9

Introduction 9

Background of Students with Learning Disabilities 10

Brief History of Learning Disabilities 10

Reading Instruction for Students with Learning Disabilities 11

Academic Expectations Around Reading 12

Theoretical Perspectives 15

Identity Theory 16

Cognitive Theories Related to Reading Motivation 18

Connection of Reading Identity Theory to Motivation Theories 23

Models of Reading 25

Integration of Reading Models 28

Review of Studies 30

Procedures for Collecting and Reviewing Articles 30

Description of a Broad Database of Articles 32
Delimitations 33
Findings From the Review of Studies 40
Discussion 49
Chapter Summary 53
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY 54
Research Questions 54
Research Methodology 54
Research Design 55
Community Setting 58
School Setting 59
Participant Recruitment and Selection 61
Data Sources and Collection Procedures 63
Data Analysis 69
Thematic Analysis 69
Analysis of Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) 73
Analysis of Motivation to Read Profile-Revised (MRP-R) 73
Limitations and Delimitations 74
Ethical Considerations 75
Positionality and Reflexivity 75
Thick Description 76
Protection of Vulnerable Participants 76
Alignment of Data with Research Questions 76

Chapter Summary 77
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS 78
Participant Profiles 78
Damien 78
K.J. 81
Stella 85
Themes 88
Perceptions of Reading 89
Perceptions of Self as Reader 92
Factors that Influence Reading Identity 106
Chapter Summary 114
CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS 116
Interpretation of the Findings 116
The Situated Nature of Reading Identity 117
School and Home Literacy Connections 118
Autonomy and Control in Reading Practices 119
Reading as an Emotional Act 120
Affordances and Challenges of Rurality 121
Implications for Practice 123
Limitations and Future Research 125
Conclusions 127
REFERENCES 128
APPENDICES 153

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Analysis of Studies 34

Table 2: Data Sources as They Relate to Research Questions.....63

Table 3: Data Collection Schedule 64

Table 4: Coding the Data 70

Table 5: Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) Outcomes 97

Table 6: Reader Self-Perception Scale Response Excerpts Related to Family and Reading 104

Table 7: Reader Self-Perception Scale Response Excerpts Related to Self and Reading 105

Table 8: Motivation to Read Profile Response Excerpts 105

Table 9: Teacher Influence on Reading (RSPS Response Excerpts) 108

Table 10: Peer Influence on Reading (RSPS Response Excerpts) 110

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Damien's Drawing of What Reading Looks Like to Him in School 94

Figure 2: K.J.'s Drawing of What Reading Looks Like to Her in School.....95

Figure 3: Stella's Drawing of What Reading Looks Like to Her in School.....96

Figure 4: Damien's Drawing of Himself Reading at Home 100

Figure 5: K.J's. Drawing of Herself Reading at Home 101

Figure 6: Stella's Drawing of Herself Reading at Home.....103

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background and Statement of Problem

I have taught children in special education who have struggled to read for over 20 years. As a special educator, I have taught children with a diagnosis of learning disability (LD). My teaching began in public schools and evolved to teaching struggling readers at independent schools in international settings. Everywhere I went, these students were frustrated by their inability to read, no matter their age or culture. Students' reading identities seem to suffer under the weight of reading failure. I noticed that some students were more persevering than others, and some were more responsive to remediation than others. Across all teaching experiences, students wanted to choose their reading materials, have a voice in their education, and feel successful in school.

I have cycled through systematic, repetitive phonics programs and read aloud simply for the joy of sharing books, without assessment as the goal. I have followed ineffective individualized education plan goals devised in public schools by well-meaning educators, and I have also designed high-interest literacy lessons in private schools to keep students engaged.

All my prior experiences as a special educator have led me to this study. I am particularly concerned with the struggling readers of rural America — students who often resist reading, who require explicit and sustained support to learn to read, and who can be motivated when knowledgeable and responsive instruction is provided. Despite decades of research on literacy instruction, many of these students remain underserved and underrepresented in both research and practice.

Research indicates that a significant number of fourth- and fifth-grade students in rural communities struggle to read (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008: Havens, 2019; Kollister, 2017;

Nevarez, 2023; Pogrow, 2009). Among these struggling readers, those diagnosed with a learning disability (LD) face even greater challenges, and their reading performance is consistently lower than that of their general education peers (Caprino, 2016). Despite these challenges, limited research has examined how this population views their reading identities, what motivates them to read, and which factors shape those identities (Ball, 2012; Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008).

National statistics illustrate the scope of the literacy problem. In 2005, the National Center for Education Statistics reported that 69% of fourth-grade students could not read at proficient levels, with 36% unable to read at or above basic levels of understanding (as cited in Wanzek et al., 2010). These figures did not account for students identified as struggling readers or those diagnosed with LD. More recent data indicate that in 2022-2023, 7.5 million students between the ages of 3 and 21 --- representing 15% of public-school students --- were diagnosed with a disability. Among students receiving special education services, the most common category was LD, accounting for 32% of all identified disabilities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024).

For rural students with LD, the dual burden of the disability label and a negative reading identity may significantly narrow the possibilities for constructing positive self-concepts as readers (Alvermann, 2001; Anderson, 2009; Bear et al., 2006; Brooks & Frankel, 2018; Riddick, 2000). Poor reading identities can lead to demotivation, which in turn negatively affects literacy outcomes (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2020). Students with LD frequently fall far below grade level compared with their general education peers (Al Otaiba et al., 2023; Bear et al., 2006' Frieden, 2004).

This raises critical questions: How do we reach these students? Are they bound to remain marginalized within the academic system? Who takes the time to ask them about their reading

practices and perspectives? What value do they place on reading, and what counts as "reading material" in their daily lives?

Purpose of Proposed Study

The contextual factors of rurality, learning disabilities, upper-elementary student ages, and reading identity focus this study on rural upper-elementary students identified with learning disabilities. The participants attend rural schools with fewer resources than those in better-funded urban districts and represent a voiceless population in literacy research. Fourth- and fifth grades are particularly pivotal years, when students are expected to apply foundational literacy skills across academic domains. At this stage, readers risk falling further behind without effective support.

By examining the reading identities of rural fourth- and fifth-grade students with LD, this study seeks to amplify the voices of learners who have not traditionally been asked how they perceive reading and themselves as readers. These insights may inform more equitable literacy practices and help educators better support students' long-term academic success.

The purpose of this qualitative descriptive study is to explore the reading identities of fourth and fifth-grade students with a learning disability (LD) in a rural community in the South-Central region of the United States. While research on reading identity has focused primarily on urban contexts and varied populations, little is known about how rural elementary students with LD perceive themselves as readers or what factors influence their literacy identities. This study seeks to address this gap by centering the voices of underrepresented students in rural schools.

The study is guided by the theoretical perspectives of identity theory, situated expectancy-value theory (SEVT), and self-determination theory (SDT), which together will provide an understanding of how context, confidence, and engagement shape reading identity.

Additionally, the drive model of reading and the active view of reading are included. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with students, surveys regarding their individual reading practices and influences, and drawings with oral explanations of their reading practices inside and outside of school.

The ultimate purpose of this study is to generate a deeper understanding of how upper elementary students with LD in rural schools perceive and construct their reading identities and what factors --- cultural, instructional, motivational, and personal --- influence those identities. Insights from this research may inform educators, researchers, and policymakers in designing more responsive literacy practices that affirm students' identities and support equitable reading achievement in rural communities.

Research Questions

By addressing the following questions, the study seeks to fill a critical gap in literacy research and provide educators with insights into how to support rural students with LD more effectively. Such understanding has the potential to shape instructional practices that foster positive reading identities and, in turn, improve students' academic performance and long-term educational trajectories. These are the research questions that guide the study:

RQ1: How do rural upper elementary students with a learning disability view their reading identity?

RQ2: What key factors influence their reading identity?

Significance of Proposed Study

This qualitative descriptive study explores the reading identities of fourth- and fifth-grade students with a learning disability (LD) who attend school in a rural community in the South-Central region of the United States in order to understand how these students perceive

themselves a readers, how they experience reading across school, home, and community contexts, and which personal, instructional, and contextual factors shape the development of their reading identities.

Given that reading identity is closely tied to motivation, engagement, and persistence, examining the life experiences of students with LD is particularly important during the upper-elementary years when academic demands increase and students become more aware of their perceived competence as readers. Rurality adds an additional layer of complexity, as students in rural communities often experience limited access to literacy resources, specialized services, and culturally relevant reading opportunities.

By centering student voices, this study moves beyond deficit-oriented perspectives or learning disabilities to illuminate the strengths, preferences, emotions, and meanings students associate with reading. Understanding the influences that support or hinder positive reading identity development has the potential to inform instructional practices that are responsive to both disability and rural context. Ultimately, such insights may guide educators in designing learning environments that foster positive reading identities, increase motivation and engagement, and support improved academic performance and more equitable long-term educational trajectories for students with LD in rural settings.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation seeks to understand how upper elementary students with a learning disability (LD) in a rural public school identify as readers and what factors influence their literacy identities. The dissertation is organized into five chapters.

Chapter 1 introduces the study. It provides background on reading identity and the historical context of LD, establishes the problem, outlines the purpose and significance of the study, and identifies the gap in existing research.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature relevant to this study. It presents the theoretical perspectives guiding the study (e.g., identity theory, the cognitive theories of situated expectancy-value theory and self-determination theory, and two models of reading). Additionally, I conducted a synthesis of research related to the questions in the study and reported findings from the synthesis.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology. It describes the qualitative descriptive design, the participant selection process, data collection methods (semi-structured interviews, surveys, and drawings), and the analytic procedures. Ethical considerations and steps to ensure trustworthiness are also detailed.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study. It includes participant profiles and reports the major themes that emerge from the data related to perceptions of self as a reader at school and perceptions of self as a reader at home. It also identifies key factors that influence reading identity of these students.

Chapter 5 interprets the findings in relation to the research questions, theoretical perspectives, and related research. It discusses the situated nature of reading identity, school and home literacy connections, autonomy and control in reading practices, reading as an emotional act, and the affordances and challenges of rurality. This chapter also addresses the implications for practice, and the study's limitations and recommendations for future research.

Altogether, these chapters provide a comprehensive exploration of how rural upper elementary students with LD perceive and construct their reading identities, contributing to a deeper understanding of this underrepresented population in literacy research.

Definition of Terms

Reading Identity

Reading identity refers to how students view themselves as readers. This includes the value they place on reading, what they read, and where and when they read. It refers to how students view themselves as readers inside and outside of school.

Reading Motivation

Reading identity is closely linked to reading motivation, which refers to the reasons students choose to engage in reading in the first place (Ryan & Deci, 1999). It is an internal drive to complete a task and is closely connected to a reader's identity.

Rurality

Rurality is the distinct character, culture, and geographic characteristics of areas generally defined by low population density, small-town lifestyles, and separation from large urban centers. Instructional practices in rural areas shape how students experience reading and reading identity. Students with LD in rural context often face compounded challenges due to geographic isolation, limited access to specialized literacy services, and fewer diagnostic and intervention resources, which can delay identification and support (Powell et al., 2009; Tichnor-Wagner et al., 2016).

Learning disability (LD)

Specific learning disability / learning disability is succinctly defined as:

> "A specific learning disability is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include children who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, of mental retardation, or emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004).

Learning disability (LD) is an umbrella term that includes dyslexia, dyscalculia, and dysgraphia. To avoid confusion in this study, I will use the term learning disability to refer to specific learning disability.

Upper Elementary Student

An upper elementary student is in grades four, five, or six and is between 9 and 13 years old (Leighton, 2024). This study's participants are from grades 4 and 5.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter 2 is organized into four sections. The first section is a brief discussion of learning disabilities, reading instruction of students with LD, and academic expectations around reading of students with LD. This provides background for the student population in this study.

The second section is a review of the literature related to identity theory, the cognitive theories of situated expectancy-value theory and self-determination theory, and models of reading, which guide this study. These perspectives provide an interdisciplinary lens for understanding how students' beliefs, motivations, and experiences shape the ways they come to see themselves as readers.

The third section is a research synthesis of empirical studies related to reading identity and considers how reading is perceived, valued, and enacted by upper-elementary students with learning disabilities who live within rural educational contexts. This body of research highlights the importance of motivation, self-perception, and environmental influences in literacy development. However, much of the existing scholarship focuses on either early elementary learners or older adolescents, and relatively little attention has been given to upper-elementary students with learning disabilities.

The final section discusses findings related to the current literature and connects these findings to the research questions guiding this study. Although scholars increasingly recognize the importance of identity in literacy development, the voices and experiences of upper-elementary students with learning disabilities living in rural communities remain largely absent from the research. This gap is significant, as rural contexts often present unique educational and resource-related challenges that may shape students' opportunities to engage with reading. The

limited scholarship in this area underscores the need for research that centers the perspectives of these students and examines the factors that influence how they develop their identities as readers.

Background of Students with Learning Disabilities

Brief History of Learning Disabilities

Learning disabilities (LD) have been recognized in the United States for more than a century. Early descriptions of reading difficulty date to the 1800s, when German physician Adolph Kassmaul used the term *word blindness* to describe individuals who could not read despite typical intellectual ability (Hallahan & Mercer, 2001). As awareness of these challenges grew, learning disabilities became formally recognized as an educational category, supported by federal research funding beginning in the 1960s (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2020). Legislative developments further established services for students with disabilities, particularly the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, which required schools to provide a free and appropriate public education. Following this legislation, identification of students with learning disabilities increased as awareness and services expanded.

Despite formal recognition, terminology surrounding learning disabilities remains complex and sometimes inconsistent. Scholars note confusion among terms such as learning disabilities and dyslexia (Ahearn, 2009; Fletcher & Miciak, 2019; Kavale & Forness, 2000). Generally, learning disabilities refer to difficulties in acquiring academic skills such as reading, writing, or mathematics despite average intelligence and adequate instruction (Kapoor & Kaul, 2024; LD Online, 2003). Although concerns exist about labeling and stigma, research suggests that diagnosis often provides an explanation for learning challenges and access to appropriate support (Riddick, 2000; Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2020). In this study, learning disabilities refer to

language-based difficulties that influence reading development among upper-elementary students in rural schools.

Reading Instruction for Students with Learning Disabilities

Students with learning disabilities often experience difficulty acquiring foundational literacy skills such as phonological processing, decoding, fluency, and comprehension. These challenges are not related to intelligence but rather to differences in how students process language and written text (Shaywitz & Shaywitz, 2020; Snowling, 2019). As a result, many students with learning disabilities require explicit and systematic instruction, along with additional opportunities for guided practice, to develop reading proficiency. Without appropriate instructional supports, repeated experiences of difficulty may negatively affect students' confidence, motivation, and perceptions of themselves as readers (Vaughn & Bos, 2015). These experiences can shape how students view their abilities and contribute to the development of their reading identities.

Effective instruction for students with learning disabilities typically includes structured, explicit teaching of reading skills, scaffolded practice, and frequent feedback to support comprehension and skill development (Swanson, 2001; Vaughn & Fletcher, 2020). Research also emphasizes the importance of differentiated instruction, opportunities for student choice, and supportive classroom environments that promote engagement with reading (Fuchs et al., 2018). When instruction addresses both literacy skill development and students' motivational and emotional experiences with reading, students are more likely to develop persistence and confidence as readers. Such practices are particularly important during the upper-elementary years, when students transition from learning to read toward reading to learn and begin forming more stable perceptions of themselves as readers.

The concept of new literacies reflects the expanding ways in which individuals read, interpret, and communicate meaning in digital environments. Literacy in the twenty-first century extends beyond traditional print texts to include multimodal forms of communication that integrate images, sound, movement, and interactive technologies (Lankshear & Knobel, 2011). These literacies emphasize participation, collaboration, and meaning making across digital platforms. As a result, literacy practices increasingly involve navigating visual and interactive texts, interpreting symbols, and engaging in socially situated learning experiences that extend beyond conventional classroom reading activities.

Video gaming is often identified as a form of new literacy because it requires players to interpret complex systems of symbols, narratives, and problem-solving tasks (Gee et al., 2015). Gee (2007) argues that video games function as powerful learning environments in which players adopt identities, interpret multimodal texts, and participate in communities of practice. For students with learning disabilities, these environments can be particularly supportive because games provide immediate feedback, repeated practice, and scaffolded challenges that allow learners to progress at their own pace. Video games also rely heavily on visual cues, interactive exploration, and contextualized problem solving, which may support students who struggle with traditional print-based literacy tasks. As students engage with these digital environments, they practice interpreting meaning, making decisions, and constructing identities as capable participants in complex literacy activities.

Academic Expectations Around Reading

Chall's model of reading development (1983) conceptualizes reading as a developmental process that evolves as readers become more proficient. The model outlines six stages of reading development, ranging from Stage 0 (prereading) to Stage 5, in which mature readers critically

construct and reconstruct knowledge through reading. Similarly, Tompkins (2017) describes literacy development as a progression in which students move from early decoding and word recognition toward increasingly complex comprehension and meaning making. Both frameworks emphasize that reading development is cumulative and that later reading success depends heavily on the mastery of foundational skills acquired during the early stages of learning to read.

Stages 1 and 2, typically occurring in grades 1–3, represent the period of *learning to read*, during which children acquire the alphabetic principle, learn to decode unfamiliar words, and develop fluency with familiar texts. Stages 3–5 represent *reading to learn*, when texts become increasingly complex and reading serves as a primary tool for acquiring new knowledge. Beginning in Stage 3 (grades 4–8), students encounter vocabulary and concepts that extend beyond their everyday experiences and must rely on fluent word recognition, expanded vocabulary, and emerging critical thinking skills to comprehend more demanding texts.

The transition from Stage 2 to Stage 3 is particularly critical. When students do not successfully shift from learning to read to reading to learn, their academic progress may be significantly hindered. This shift has often been associated with the "fourth-grade slump," especially among students from low-income backgrounds, underscoring the importance of understanding why some students navigate this transition successfully while others struggle.

Chall et al. (1990) further emphasized the influence of home literacy environments, noting that children from low-income households—conditions often present in rural communities—may face additional challenges during the transition from learning to read to reading to learn. As students move from mastering the mechanics of reading to constructing meaning from increasingly complex texts, the cognitive and linguistic demands of literacy increase substantially.

Tompkins (2017) also explains that as students progress through elementary school, successful reading requires not only accurate decoding but also expanded vocabulary, background knowledge, and strategic comprehension skills. This shift typically occurs during the upper-elementary grades, when students encounter texts containing unfamiliar vocabulary and concepts beyond their everyday experiences. Chall's findings suggest that slower reading development among many low-income students is largely attributable to gaps in specific literacy skills rather than differences in cognitive ability.

Research also indicates that disparities in reading achievement may appear early in students' schooling. Compared with typical readers, children with learning disabilities demonstrate lower reading scores and verbal IQ as early as first grade, and their reading trajectories do not converge with those of their peers over time (Ferrer et al., 2015). These findings suggest that the gap is not primarily the result of widening differences across the years but rather reflects disparities that are already present when students begin formal reading instruction. The achievement gap between typical readers and students with learning disabilities is therefore evident early and often persists into adolescence, underscoring the importance of early identification and effective reading instruction beginning in the earliest years of schooling.

These developmental perspectives highlight the importance of the upper-elementary years as a pivotal period in literacy development. During this stage, students are expected to move beyond foundational decoding skills and use reading as a tool for acquiring new knowledge and understanding increasingly complex texts (Chall, 1983; Tompkins, 2017). For students with learning disabilities, however, this transition may present additional challenges because foundational reading skills may still be developing. As a result, these students may encounter repeated difficulty with grade-level texts during the period when reading demands

intensify. Such experiences may influence not only academic achievement but also student's reading identity. Understanding how upper-elementary students with learning disabilities interpret these experiences is therefore important for examining how reading identities develop within this critical stage of literacy learning.

Theoretical Perspectives

Several theories have been applied in the study of reading identity, and these perspectives help frame the ways in which reading identity is understood. Constructivist and sociocultural theories emphasize that knowledge is actively constructed through interaction with one's environment rather than passively absorbed, and that cognitive development is inherently social, driven by interaction with more knowledgeable others and cultural tools (Piaget, 1950; Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Vygotsky, 1997). Learning occurs first on a social level and is later internalized. Within this view, social interaction plays a central role in improving student learning (O'Connell, 2023; Panos, 2017). Handsfield (2016) asserts that learning occurs most effectively when prior knowledge and social contexts are considered, and when new learning is connected to meaningful experiences within socially mediated spaces. Assimilation of information occurs through interaction with the environment, including peers, situating learners as active participants rather than passive recipients of teacher-directed knowledge.

Two primary theories were specifically drawn upon to inform this study—identity theory (Alvermann, 2001; Glenn et al., 2018; Hall, 2007, 2012, 2016; Wagner et al., 2024), and cognitive theory related to motivation (Deci et al., 1992). Taken together, these perspectives underscore the need to examine reading identity not only as an outcome of ability or motivation, but also as a dynamic, contextually situated construct shaped by both internal perceptions and external influences.

Identity Theory

Identity theory encompasses multiple frameworks depending on disciplinary perspective, including social psychology and developmental theory (Burke & Stets, 2023). In literacy research, *social or personal identity* refers to how individuals' perceptions of themselves as readers are shaped through membership in social groups such as families, peer networks, classrooms, and communities, all of which influence reading practices, expectations, and values. These sociocultural contexts play a central role in shaping how reading is experienced, valued, and enacted.

Developmental identity theory further conceptualizes identity through status categories—achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and diffusion—which can be applied to reading identity. *Achievement identity* reflects high exploration and strong commitment, as seen in readers who have engaged with diverse texts and developed a confident, self-endorsed sense of themselves as readers. *Moratorium* describes high exploration with low commitment, in which readers actively experiment with genres or reading roles without yet forming a stable reading identity. *Foreclosure* reflects high commitment with limited exploration, often characterized by compliance with externally imposed expectations about reading. *Diffusion* involves low exploration and low commitment and is frequently associated with disengagement from reading, particularly when students experience limited support or repeated failure. Across these frameworks, motivation theories emphasize identity as a key driver of behavior, influencing individuals' engagement, persistence, and participation in literacy practices.

Identity theory has been used extensively to frame research on reading identity (Alvermann, 2001; Glenn et al., 2018; Hall, 2007, 2012, 2016, 2020; Hikida, 2018; Jones, 2004; Wagner et al., 2024). Alvermann (2001), for example, drew on Gee's concept of the "identity

kit" (Gee, 1996, 2014) to illustrate how one participant—a ninth grader who played video games—recognized other readers within the school discourse and described his own reading identity in positive terms, despite scoring below grade level on standardized assessments. This case highlighted the role of culture in constructing what counts, and who counts, as a reader, while also showing that such constructions can be disrupted by students' self-perceptions.

Glenn et al. (2018) similarly demonstrated that reading identity is not a singular representation of self, but a totality of experiences situated within social contexts (see also Weinrich, 2003, 2008, 2009, as cited in Glenn et al., 2018). Their findings revealed that students from challenging home environments could still position themselves as competent readers, challenging the deficit-oriented labels often applied by schools. This aligns with Alvermann's (2001) conclusion that students' identities are shaped through agency as well as institutional discourse.

A key concern in identity theory is the role of labels. Students who are designated "good" or "struggling" readers often internalize these labels, which can become defining academic characteristics (Hall, 2020; Learned, 2018). Once established, negative reading identities may persist across schooling, although they can shift when students encounter positive, affirming literacy experiences (Brooks & Frankel, 2018; Hall, 2020; Learned, 2018). Hikida (2018) extends this idea by arguing that reading identities accumulate social meanings over time, with the "struggling" label narrowing how students perceive themselves and how they are expected to engage with text.

Identity theory positions reading identity as fluid, socially constructed, and contextually contingent. It underscores how institutional labels, cultural discourses, and personal agency intersect to shape how students see themselves as readers. This framework is especially relevant

for students with learning disabilities, whose school experiences often involve deficit labels, yet who may develop more complex and affirming reading identities when given opportunities to exercise agency and experience success.

Identity theory is one of the theoretical frameworks guiding this study. While Situated expectancy-value theory (SEVT) and self-determination theory (SDT) explain how students' beliefs about competence and value shape their motivation to read, identity theory highlights how these beliefs are socially constructed and mediated through cultural discourses, institutional labels, and personal agency.

Cognitive Theories Related to Reading Motivation

Reading identity refers to how individuals perceive themselves as readers and how those perceptions influence their engagement with literacy practices. A student's reading identity develops through a complex interaction of personal experiences, instructional contexts, and sociocultural influences that shape attitudes toward reading over time. Researchers increasingly recognize that reading identity is closely tied to motivation, self-perception, and opportunities to interact with meaningful texts. When students view themselves as capable and valued readers, they are more likely to engage with reading activities, persist through challenges, and develop stronger literacy skills. Conversely, students who repeatedly experience difficulty with reading may internalize negative beliefs about their abilities, which can reduce motivation and participation in literacy activities.

For students with learning disabilities, reading identity can be particularly fragile. Difficulties with decoding, fluency, and comprehension often lead to repeated academic challenges that shape how students view themselves as readers. These experiences may influence not only their academic performance but also their willingness to engage in reading both inside

and outside of school. Over time, these perceptions can become internalized, contributing to either positive or negative reading identities that affect long-term literacy development. Context also plays a critical role in the development of reading identity. Educational environments, family influences, and community resources shape how students interact with texts and understand the value of reading in their lives.

Students in rural communities may encounter unique contextual factors, including geographic isolation, limited access to libraries and literacy programs, and fewer educational resources. These conditions can affect opportunities for literacy engagement and may be further compounded for students with learning disabilities who require targeted instructional support. Understanding how reading identity develops within these contexts is therefore essential for designing instructional practices that foster both literacy growth and positive self-perceptions as readers.

Cognitive theories of motivation focus on how individuals' beliefs, expectations, goals, and interpretations influence their willingness to engage in learning tasks. Unlike earlier behaviorist perspectives that emphasize external reinforcement, cognitive approaches emphasize internal thought processes that shape motivation and behavior. These theories propose that learners are active participants in constructing meaning from their experiences and that their perceptions of competence, task value, and control influence the effort they invest in academic activities (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). In educational contexts, cognitive motivational frameworks help explain why students choose to engage with certain tasks, how long they persist when challenges arise, and how they interpret success or failure.

A central assumption of cognitive motivation theories is that learners' beliefs about their abilities and the value of a task influence their engagement. Expectancy-value perspectives, for

example, suggest that students' motivation to participate in an activity depends largely on whether they believe they can succeed and whether they perceive the task as worthwhile (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Students who believe they can succeed and who perceive a task as meaningful or useful are more likely to demonstrate persistence and effort. Conversely, when students doubt their competence or view a task as irrelevant, their motivation to participate often diminishes. These cognitive appraisals develop through repeated academic experiences, feedback from teachers and peers, and the broader instructional and sociocultural contexts in which learning occurs.

Within literacy research, cognitive theories of motivation are frequently used to explain why some students engage deeply with reading while others disengage. Reading requires sustained effort, strategic thinking, and persistence, particularly as texts become more complex. Students' beliefs about their reading abilities, their perceptions of the value of reading, and their sense of autonomy in selecting and engaging with texts can influence their motivation to read (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997). These motivational beliefs are particularly important for students who experience difficulty with reading, as repeated struggles may shape how they interpret their competence and their role as readers.

The literature frequently draws upon motivational theories such as situated expectancy-value theory (SEVT) and self-determination theory (SDT) to explain how reading identity develops. Self-determination theory emphasizes the role of intrinsic motivation and psychological needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness in sustaining engagement with learning tasks (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation, for example, has been cited by several researchers as central to sustaining engagement in reading (Louick et al., 2016; Neugebauer, 2016). Other studies extend to additional psychological frameworks. Cantrell and Rintamaa

(2019) employed both cognitive engagement theory and Flavell's (1979) model of cognitive monitoring to explore reading motivation.

Additional research has examined the interaction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in literacy engagement. Marinak and Gambrell (2008) investigated the relationship between rewards and intrinsic motivation among third-grade readers. Their findings indicated that when reading extended beyond required instructional time, students were influenced by external rewards, suggesting that extrinsic motivators can complicate the cultivation of intrinsic motivation. Similarly, Murnan et al. (2023) conducted a systematic literature review that examined both cognitive processes of reading—including phonemic awareness, phonics, and vocabulary—and motivational constructs. Their analysis positioned motivation theory as a central framework for understanding how cognitive and motivational factors interact in literacy development.

These theoretical perspectives provide an important lens for understanding how students develop perceptions of themselves as readers. For students with learning disabilities, motivational beliefs about competence, autonomy, and task value may be shaped by repeated experiences of difficulty with reading tasks. These experiences can influence how students interpret their reading abilities and whether they view reading as an attainable or meaningful activity. In rural contexts, where access to literacy resources and instructional supports may be more limited, these motivational dynamics may be particularly significant. Examining how motivational processes influence reading identity therefore provides important insight into how upper-elementary students with learning disabilities understand themselves as readers and what factors contribute to the development of their reading identities.

Situated Expectancy-Value Theory

Situated expectancy-value theory (SEVT) underscores the importance of students' situations, backgrounds, and life experiences in shaping motivation and academic performance (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020; Jones, 2022; Neugebauer, 2016; Wigfield, 1994). This theory reflects the specific cultural and social contexts students live within, which causes them to perceive academic tasks and expectations differently from students who do not live in rural areas. The participants in this study are from low socioeconomic and rural backgrounds, situated in a South-Central region characterized by farmland and Native American cultural influences. Their situated experiences are likely to shape their motivation to read and the value they place on reading. Although the specific impact of background and life experience on subjective task values has not been fully researched (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020), existing studies suggest that life contexts influence both motivation and reading identity (Jones, 2004, 2022; Neugebauer, 2016).

Situated expectancy-value theory underscores the importance of students' situations, backgrounds, and life experiences in shaping motivation and academic performance. Expectancy-value theory may explain how students weigh the perceived benefits of reading against their confidence in their reading ability, relating to living in a rural area and being identified as having LD.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci & Ryan, 2012) has also been widely applied in the study of reading motivation, which is a building block of reading identity. Wehmeyer and colleagues (2017) drew upon SDT to highlight how relatedness, autonomy, and competence shape students' engagement with reading tasks. This theory's emphasis on psychological needs makes it particularly relevant for understanding the motivational profiles of students with learning disabilities, who may struggle with competence yet benefit significantly from autonomy

and relational support. Self-determination theory supports the idea that students who possess self-efficacy are more likely to persist in challenging tasks and achieve higher outcomes, addressing potential key factors that impact reading identity.

Connection of Reading Identity Theory to Motivation Theories

Reading identity is closely connected to reading motivation, which refers to the reasons students choose to engage in reading. Motivation influences individuals' willingness to initiate and sustain reading behaviors and is therefore closely related to how students perceive themselves as readers. Motivation may be intrinsic, extrinsic, or amotivational (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Self-determination theory and expectancy–value theory are commonly used to explain students' motivation to engage in reading practices (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; Martin-Chang et al., 2021; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Although substantial scholarship has examined reading motivation among adolescent readers in general education settings (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014), comparatively little research has explored how motivational processes function for upper elementary students with learning disabilities (Sideridis & Scanlon, 2006).

Self-determination theory (SDT) suggests that motivation develops when three basic psychological needs are met: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Autonomy refers to students' sense of agency and opportunity to make choices; competence reflects their belief in their ability to succeed; and relatedness involves supportive relationships that encourage learning. In literacy contexts, these needs may be fostered when students are able to select texts aligned with their interests, experience scaffolded reading success, and engage in supportive interactions with teachers, peers, and family members. Although extrinsic incentives such as rewards or praise may promote task completion, overreliance on external rewards may weaken intrinsic motivation and should therefore be used cautiously (Bear et al., 2017). In

contrast, amotivation refers to the absence of motivation or avoidance of reading engagement (Deibler, 2018).

Situated expectancy–value theory (SEVT) further explains how students' beliefs influence their engagement with reading. According to SEVT, students' participation in academic tasks is shaped by their expectancy for success and the value they assign to the activity (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020). Students who believe they can succeed, and who view reading as meaningful or useful, are more likely to engage in reading and develop positive reading identities. For students with learning disabilities, these beliefs are often shaped by repeated experiences with reading difficulty as well as feedback and support from teachers, peers, and family members.

Despite their explanatory value, general motivational frameworks have limitations. Critics note that such theories may assume universal applicability while overlooking cultural and contextual variability among learners (Jones, 2022). Additionally, many engagement models presume that students can independently identify task demands, select strategies, and monitor comprehension. These assumptions may not reflect the experiences of students with learning disabilities, who frequently require explicit instruction and sustained support to engage in strategic reading behaviors (Guthrie & Davis, 2003).

To address these limitations, the present study draws on reading identity theory, situated expectancy–value theory (SEVT), and self-determination theory (SDT). Together, these frameworks highlight how students' beliefs about themselves as readers, the value they assign to reading, and their experiences of autonomy, competence, and relatedness shape literacy engagement. These perspectives are particularly relevant for rural upper-elementary students with learning disabilities, whose reading experiences may be influenced by instructional

challenges as well as contextual factors such as access to literacy resources, instructional supports, and family literacy practices. Guided by these frameworks, the present study seeks to understand how upper-elementary students with learning disabilities in rural environments view their reading identity and what factors contribute to the development of those identities.

Models of Reading

In addition to the identity and motivational theories framing this study, two contemporary models of reading provide lenses for interpreting the data: the Drive Model of Reading (Duke & Cartwright, 2018) and the Active View of Reading (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Both models extend beyond the Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer, 1986, as cited in Duke & Cartwright, 2018, 2021), which focuses solely on decoding and listening comprehension. These expanded models capture the multifaceted nature of literacy and are useful for examining how students with learning disabilities construct their reading identities.

The Drive Model of Reading

The Drive Model of Reading (Duke & Cartwright, 2018) uses the metaphor of driving to illustrate the many interrelated processes that influence reading. In this model, multiple features correspond to aspects of reading development:

- Reading for a purpose represents the *destination*.
- Reading motivation is the *ignition and fuel*.
- Reading conditions resemble *weather conditions*.
- Text types, structures, and content are akin to *road types, roadmaps, signals, and scenery*.
- Concepts of print and graphics represent the *vehicle*.
- Culture provides the *rules of the road*.

- Background knowledge is the *route of knowledge*.
- Decoding and word recognition are the *tires*, while phonological awareness serves as the *tire treads*.
- Reading fluency is the *axle*.
- Language knowledge forms seats *and chassis*.
- Comprehension monitoring is represented by the *dashboard*.
- Strategic reading behaviors align with the *driver*.
- Critical reading is likened to *road reviews*.
- Executive skills correspond to the *multi-tasking driver*.

This model highlights reading as a coordinated process influenced not only by skill development but also by motivation, background, context, and regulation. It conceptualizes reading as a coordinated and dynamic process shaped not only by the development of discrete skills, but also by motivational processes, background knowledge, contextual influences, and self-regulation. Rather than positioning reading as a purely cognitive task, the Drive Model foregrounds the interaction among affective, social, and environmental factors that influence how students engage with text over time. For the purposes of this study, the Drive Model offers a useful framework for examining how these interrelated factors contribute to the formation of students' reading identities in rural contexts.

Rural students' reading experiences are embedded within a particular community setting characterized by geographic isolation, locally situated literacies, and varying access to instructional and material resources. By accounting for motivation, context, and regulation alongside skill development, the Drive Model allows for a more holistic understanding of how rural upper-elementary students with learning disabilities (LD) come to see themselves as

readers, how they interpret their reading experiences, and how they decide whether reading is worthwhile, attainable, or personally meaningful.

The Active View of Reading

The Active View of Reading extends the Simple View of Reading by emphasizing readers as active constructors of meaning rather than passive recipients of text (Duke & Cartwright, 2021). While the Simple View conceptualizes reading comprehension as the product of decoding and listening comprehension, the Active View broadens this perspective by accounting for the complex and dynamic processes readers use to make sense of text. The model introduces three additional dimensions that operate alongside word recognition and language comprehension: contributors to reading, the bridge, and self-regulation.

Contributors to reading include a range of cognitive, linguistic, motivational, and experiential factors—such as background knowledge, vocabulary, working memory, interest, and prior literacy experiences—that support or constrain reading development. These contributors are particularly salient for students in rural contexts, whose access to print, instructional resources, and literacy experiences may differ from those of their suburban or urban peers. For upper-elementary students with learning disabilities, variability in these contributors can significantly shape how reading is experienced and enacted in and out of school.

The bridge refers to the processes that connect word recognition and language comprehension, emphasizing that these components are not independent but overlapping and mutually reinforcing. The bridge highlights the ways readers integrate decoding with meaning-making processes such as inference, syntax, and semantic processing. For students with LD, difficulties in decoding or language comprehension can disrupt this integration, requiring additional cognitive effort and strategic support to maintain comprehension during reading tasks.

Self-regulation represents the reader's capacity to monitor understanding, manage effort, persist through difficulty, and adjust strategies as needed. This dimension is especially relevant for upper-elementary students with LD, who may experience repeated reading challenges that tax both cognitive and emotional resources. Self-regulation is closely tied to motivation, interest, and self-efficacy, influencing whether students persist in reading or disengage when faced with difficulty. In rural contexts, where instructional supports may be limited, students' ability to regulate attention, effort, and emotional responses to reading becomes even more consequential.

For the purposes of this study, the Active View of Reading provides a robust framework for examining how upper-elementary students with LD regulate effort, motivation, and engagement across varied reading contexts. By attending to contributors, bridging processes, and self-regulation, the model supports an analysis of how students' reading experiences shape not only their comprehension but also their evolving reading identities—including how they see themselves as readers, how they interpret reading success or struggle, and how they decide whether reading is worthwhile and attainable.

Integration of Reading Models

Together, the Drive Model and the Active View of Reading provide complementary and theoretically robust frameworks for interpreting how upper-elementary students with learning disabilities (LD) in rural educational settings experience reading and construct their reading identities. Each model highlights dimensions of literacy development that are essential for understanding not only how students read, but how they come to see themselves as readers across contexts.

The Drive Model conceptualizes reading development as the result of dynamic interactions among cognitive processes, motivation, self-regulation, and contextual influences.

This model is particularly relevant to the present study because it recognizes that reading outcomes are shaped not solely by skill acquisition, but by the conditions under which reading occurs, including instructional environments, access to resources, emotional responses, and students' beliefs about their competence. For students with LD in rural settings—who may experience constrained access to specialized services, limited literacy resources, and repeated encounters with difficulty—the Drive Model offers a lens for examining how contextual and motivational factors interact with cognitive demands to influence reading identity development.

In contrast, the Active View of Reading emphasizes readers as active, self-regulated meaning-makers who engage strategically with text. This model foregrounds students' agency in monitoring comprehension, managing effort, and persisting through challenge. Such an emphasis is especially important for understanding reading identity among students with LD, as it highlights how students' perceptions of control, effort, and strategy use may shape whether they view themselves as capable and engaged readers. The Active View of Reading aligns with this study's focus on student voice by valuing learners' internal processes and decision-making during reading, rather than positioning reading as a passive or purely instructional act.
When integrated, these models support a holistic understanding of reading identity as a multidimensional construct that emerges through the interaction of skill, motivation, self-regulation, and context.

This integrated perspective aligns with the study's emphasis on reading identity as socially and contextually situated, recognizing that students' self-perceptions as readers are shaped not only by classroom instruction but also by experiences at home and within rural communities. For upper-elementary students with LD, whose reading identities may be particularly vulnerable during a period of increasing academic demands, the combined use of the

Drive Model and the Active View of Reading provides a conceptual foundation for examining how personal beliefs, instructional experiences, and environmental conditions jointly influence literacy engagement and identity formation.

Review of Studies

This section presents a review of empirical studies relevant to understanding the reading identities of upper-elementary students with learning disabilities in rural contexts. The studies included were selected to illuminate how reading identity, motivation, instructional practices, and contextual factors have been conceptualized and examined in prior research. Together, this body of literature provides a foundation for identifying patterns, gaps, and areas of convergence that inform the focus and design of the present study.

Procedures for Collecting and Reviewing Articles

To identify relevant scholarship addressing the research questions of how rural upper-elementary students identified as having a learning disability view their reading identity, a structured search and selection process was conducted. The purpose of this process was to locate empirical studies that examined reading identity, literacy motivation, and instructional contexts relevant to students with learning disabilities in rural educational settings. Specific inclusion criteria, search terms, and review procedures were used to ensure that selected studies were both methodologically sound and closely aligned with the focus of the present study.

Articles included in the review were required to be published in peer-reviewed journals to ensure research quality. The search was also limited to studies conducted within the United States so that the findings would be applicable to U.S. teachers and public school contexts. Because this study focuses on an understudied population, particular attention was given to research involving upper-elementary students. Studies examining elementary students' reading

identities were prioritized to better understand how identity theory has been conceptualized and operationalized within literacy research.

Additional inclusion criteria focused on research addressing learning disabilities broadly, including students receiving special education services or those identified through Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Studies examining reading instruction and teaching practices related to struggling readers were also considered. Because this study examines rural educational contexts, preference was given to research conducted in rural schools or involving students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Search terms reflected commonly used terminology within literacy and special education research. Terms included *upper elementary, adolescents, struggling readers, reading identity, special education, learning disabilities, learning disability (LD), dyslexia, remediation strategies, rural education, low socioeconomic status (SES), motivation,* and *reading motivation*. Searches were conducted using the University of Oklahoma library's online databases, which yielded 56 articles through combinations of these terms.

The initial search prioritized recent research published between 2019 and 2025. However, because relatively few studies addressed reading identity among rural upper-elementary students with learning disabilities, the timeframe was expanded to include literature published between 1999 and 2025. Earlier sources were included when they represented seminal work relevant to reading identity, literacy motivation, or learning disabilities. All selected articles were written in English and published in peer-reviewed journals.

All identified articles underwent an initial screening process in which the abstracts and findings sections were reviewed to determine whether the studies met the established search parameters. Studies that did not align with the inclusion criteria were excluded at this stage.

When an article appeared potentially relevant based on the preliminary screening, a full-text review was conducted to evaluate its methodological quality and relevance to the research questions. This two-stage review process ensured that the literature considered for the study aligned closely with the focus on reading identity among rural upper-elementary students with learning disabilities.

After this screening and review process, 15 studies were identified as most closely aligned with the research questions and were included in the final analysis. Several delimitations also shaped the final selection of literature. The review focused on learning disabilities broadly rather than dyslexia specifically, as dyslexia represents a more narrowly defined condition. Additionally, the search was limited to research conducted in the United States to ensure applicability to U.S. public schools. Locating studies only centered on rural upper-elementary students proved challenging, as many studies included older participants in middle or high school or were conducted in urban educational settings.

Description of a Broad Database of Articles

The primary databases used in this research synthesis included: Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) sponsored by the Institute of Educational Sciences and the U.S. Department of Education; SAGE Publishing, an academic publisher of books and journals; EBSCO Information Services and EBSCOhost that publishes scholarly research; JSTOR (Journal Storage), an independent, not-for-profit digital research database accessible internationally; Taylor & Francis Online that accesses peer-reviewed journal articles; Wiley Online Library, which provides an extensive collection of authoritative online journals and books; Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), which features access to diverse, open access journals around the world; the International Literacy Association (ILA) that publishes journals and magazines with

literacy research translated into research-based practices; and Springer Nature that publishes scholarly work related to science. These databases featured search parameters, limiters and expanders, language preferences, print options, link options, and mobile access, which allowed me to gather relevant, high-quality, and authoritative research.

Delimitations

Despite a systematic and comprehensive search process, the body of research directly examining the reading identities of rural upper-elementary students with learning disabilities remains limited. Consequently, this review includes studies conducted with adjacent populations, such as students in urban or suburban contexts, older students, or research focused on reading motivation and engagement rather than reading identity explicitly.

The review was intentionally delimited to peer-reviewed, English-language studies conducted primarily in the United States to ensure relevance to U.S. public school contexts; however, these criteria may have excluded potentially informative international or practitioner-based research. In addition, inconsistencies in definitions of learning disability and dyslexia across studies complicated direct comparison of findings, particularly given the evolving understanding of these constructs over time. Although recent research was prioritized, the scarcity of contemporary studies required inclusion of seminal works published outside the initial five-year timeframe. These limitations underscore the need for empirical research that centers rural upper-elementary students with learning disabilities and examines reading identity within their specific educational and sociocultural contexts.

Studies were categorized using two complementary approaches (see Table 1). First, each study was examined according to its research purpose, research design, participant characteristics, and major findings. Second, the studies were analyzed thematically to identify

patterns across the literature. Six primary themes emerged from this analysis: the relationship between reading identity and agency, the relationship between reading identity and labeling; the relationship between reading identity and motivation; reading identity of students with learning disabilities; reading identity of upper elementary struggling readers; and reading identity of students with LD in rural settings.

Table 1

Analysis of Studies

Study	Research Purpose	Research Design	Participant Characteristics	Conclusions
		Reading Identity and Agency		
Alvermann (2001)	To examine one student's reader ID	Qualitative Case study Interview	Ninth grade African American struggling reader; reading at fourth grade level	Reading identity improved with use of video games. Agency & choice support reading ID.
Becnal & Moeller (2015)	To learn what, how, and why rural teens read based on their viewpoints	Qualitative study Focus groups	100 tenth graders rural North Carolina	Preference to self-choose teen reading material, which improved their reading ID and self-image in relation to reading. Rural teen reader has much in common with urban/suburban

				teen reader. Participants expressed an interest in print material over digital.
Frankel (2016)	To examine how understandings of literacy and and students' reading IDs interact with literacy intervention classes	Qualitative case study interviews observations artifacts	Two high school students 1-African Am. Male; 1-White female	Students' acts of agency and teachers' interpretations of those acts are informed by students' perceptions of themselves as readers and teachers' under-standing of literacy and learning in an intervention classroom.
Frankel & Fields (2019)	To study the reading ID of students intervention	Qualitative case study Interviews Artifacts	Two high school students in 9th gr struggling readers	Student agency positively affects reading ID
Hikida (2018)	To disrupt the deficiency and identity to create positive	Qualitative Case study Discourse analysis	Three Hispanic 5th graders from central Texas public elementary school	Agency allows student voices to be heard, enabling positive

	reading ID within group text discussion			reading ID

Study	Research Purpose	Research Design	Participant Characteristics	Conclusions
		Reading Identity and Labeling		
Gerwin (2021)	To examine how students would describe themselves as a reader.	Qualitative case study Interviews Survey Questions Artifacts	Nine 5th grade students Suburban school near large midwestern city	Participants resisted labels. Low levels of persistence. Value-laden language categorizes readers. Students' self-perception was that of a personal experience.
Glenn et al. (2018)	To examine persistence of struggling readers in YAL course	Qualitative study Phenomenology	Five high school struggling readers in northeast suburban & urban schools	Positive reading IDs maintained in spite of home environments, school practices, and friend influence
Hall (2007)	How do struggling readers view themselves so teachers can respond to student needs	Qualitative case study Observation Questionnaires Interviews	Three middle school girls, aged 12	Students were interested and cared about learning content in text. Students chose to forgo

				learning to prevent being seen as a non-reader by peers.
Hall (2012)	How do students' discussions about text look similar or different based on reading ID?	Mixed methods Achievement tests Surveys Observation Group interview	52 students in 6th grade Rural south Middle school (2)	Students who self-identified as high-performance readers talked about text in ways different from students who self-identified as being average or low-performing readers.
Hall (2020)	Why do individuals who self-identified as poor readers enjoy reading stories on the app Delight Games? How have users' experience with the app changed their reading practices?	Qualitative study Surveys Interviews	Five youth, ages 13-17 37 adults	The stories on the app were engaging and enjoyable to read. The participants had freedom to read without labels. The app allowed them to improve their reading ability. Using the app

	Who are the users of the app who self-identify as poor readers?			allowed them to redefine them-selves as readers but not enough to read material in other contexts.
Learned (2018)	To examine how struggling readers' reading ID across disciplines changed or stayed the same	Qualitative study Interviews Surveys Artifacts	Eight 9th grade struggling readers Urban high school	Overall students were positioned as deficient until classroom context focused on disciplinary literacy. Then students positioned themselves as competent readers
Masterson (2022)	To examine how mandatory enrollment in a remedial reading program affected their reading ID	Qualitative Ethnographic study Interviews Observations	Three 9th grade minority students One teacher Urban – city high school	High-stakes testing was conflated by students as reading assessment, negatively affected reading ID
Skerrett (2012)	Do pedagogical practices	Qualitative Case study	One 15-year-old Latina Struggling reader	Disciplinary literacy know-

	reconstruct stronger reading ID?		Urban high school	ledge builds positive reader ID. Youth can strengthen reading ID by determining out-side school contexts and extending them. Teachers can help build meaningful contexts through their relationship practices with students.

Study	Research Purpose	Research Design	Participant Characteristics	Conclusions
		Reading Identity and Motivation		
Bozack (2011)	Do motivational constructs for elementary years hold true for high school?	Mixed methods Questionnaire ACT scores Achievement scores	Catholic all-boys high school 330 students in grades 9, 10, 11 Northeastern U.S.	Motives for reading remain stable across the years from elementary to high school. Some aspects of motivation may change over time. Student reading ID correlated

				positively with how they believe teachers rated their ability. No significant relationship between student self-reports and teacher reports of reading ability. Reading ID strongly correlates with motivation.
McCarthey (2001)	What features of the literacy curriculum played a role in reading ID construction?	Qualitative study Case study Life story	Texas elementary 12 participants 5th grade -multicultural (only 3 struggling readers)	Students were motivated by gaining points and winning prizes. Students need to connect their literate selves to other aspects of their identities.

Findings from Review of Studies

There are six themes that emerged from the research synthesis. Each theme is explained and discussed below.

Relationship Between Reading Identity and Agency

Five studies in the literature examined the relationship between reading identity and student agency. Across these studies, a consistent finding emerged: when students are given opportunities to exercise choice in their reading—such as selecting their own texts or engaging with personally meaningful literacy practices—they tend to develop more positive reading identities.

These studies were qualitative in design, including four case studies and one focus group study. Most research in this area has focused on older students; four of the five studies examined high school–aged participants in urban school settings. Researchers collected data through interviews, observations, and analysis of student artifacts to better understand how students perceived themselves as readers and how agency influenced those perceptions. Alvermann's (2001) study quoted the participant voice of Grady and focused on using video games as a way to motivate student reading.

Despite the predominance of urban high school contexts in the literature, the findings contributed to the understanding of reading identity development more broadly. For example, Becnal and Moeller (2015) conducted their study in a rural high school in North Carolina and similarly found that students' sense of ownership over reading activities strengthened their engagement and self-perception as readers. Across studies, teacher–student relationships also played a significant role in fostering agency. When teachers created classroom environments that valued student voice and allowed for meaningful participation in literacy decisions, students reported greater motivation and a stronger identification with reading.

Research involving elementary-aged students also supports the connection between agency and reading identity. Hikida (2018), using discourse analysis with three Hispanic fifth-

grade students, demonstrated that opportunities for agency—particularly when students could share their perspectives and engage with texts relevant to their interests—enabled students' voices to be heard and supported the development of more positive reading identities. In this study, engagement with multimodal texts, including video games as reading material, also contributed to students' sense of themselves as capable and interested readers.

Similarly, Skerrett (2012) examined the reading identity of a Latina ninth-grade student in an urban school by analyzing both school-based and out-of-school literacy practices. Findings highlighted the importance of literacies that occur outside of formal schooling contexts. When students were able to exercise agency in these environments—choosing what and how they read—those experiences strengthened their reading identities. Together, these studies suggest that agency, choice, and opportunities for authentic literacy engagement are central to how students develop and sustain positive reading identities.

Relationship Between Reading Identity and Labeling

Eight studies in the literature examined the role of labeling in shaping students' reading identities, particularly among students identified as struggling readers. These labels were either self-identified by students or assigned by teachers, schools, or institutional systems such as intervention placement or standardized testing. Gerwin's (2021) study included nine fifth-grade participants, while the majority of studies in this category focused on middle- and high school–aged students. One outlier study, Hall (2020), expanded the participant pool to include 37 adults along with five adolescents between the ages of 13 and 17, offering a broader perspective on how reading labels can persist across time and educational contexts.

Across these studies, researchers explored how labels such as "struggling reader" influenced students' perceptions of themselves as readers. Findings suggested that students' self-perceptions

were complex and often resistant to the deficit-oriented labels imposed upon them. Many students reported that they continued to value reading despite experiencing difficulty, although they frequently concealed their struggles from peers to avoid embarrassment or stigma.

In two studies, Alvermann (2001) and Hall (2020), students also described using technology, digital texts, or literacy applications as tools that allowed them to reframe their abilities and redefine themselves as readers. Nevertheless, across all studies a consistent pattern emerged: when students were positioned by school systems as deficient readers, their reading identities were negatively affected.

Two studies, Learned (2018) and Skerrett (2012), approached the issue of labeling through the lens of disciplinary literacy instruction. These studies found that when students were explicitly taught the language and practices associated with disciplinary literacy, they began to position themselves as competent readers within academic contexts. Rather than reinforcing deficit labels, this instructional approach helped students recognize their growing expertise and strengthened their reading identities.

High-stakes standardized testing also emerged as a significant factor influencing reading identity. Several studies reported that students conflated performance on standardized assessments with their overall ability to read. When students performed poorly on these tests, they often internalized the results as evidence that they were "bad readers," which contributed to negative reading identities. Frankel's (2016) year-long case study further complicates this picture. Following focal students placed in classrooms designated for literacy intervention, Frankel found that many participants continued to view themselves as capable readers despite their placement in intervention programs based on standardized test scores. This finding suggests that institutional labeling does not uniformly determine students' reading identities; rather,

students actively negotiate and interpret these labels in relation to their broader literacy experiences.

Taken together, the literature suggests that labeling practices—whether through formal school structures, testing systems, or social perceptions—play a powerful role in shaping how students understand themselves as readers. However, the research also indicates that students exercise agency in resisting or reinterpreting these labels, particularly when provided with supportive instructional contexts and opportunities to demonstrate competence in literacy practices.

Connection Between Reading Identity and Motivation

Research suggests that reading identity is closely connected to students' motivation to engage with texts. Bozack (2011) examined this relationship using a mixed-methods design with 330 male students in Grades 9 through 11 attending a Catholic school in the northeastern United States. Findings indicated that while certain aspects of reading motivation shift over time, many underlying motives for reading remain relatively stable from elementary through high school. Notably, students' reading identities were positively associated with how they believed their teachers perceived their reading ability; students who believed their teachers viewed them as capable readers reported stronger reading identities and higher motivation to read.

Similarly, McCarthey (2001) examined how features of the literacy curriculum contribute to reading identity construction in a qualitative case study of 12 fifth-grade students in a multicultural Texas elementary school, including three struggling readers. Findings suggested that students' motivation to read was shaped not only by classroom structures but also by opportunities to connect literacy practices to their broader identities. Although some students

were initially motivated by external incentives such as points or prizes, deeper engagement occurred when reading activities aligned with students' experiences, interests, and sense of self.

A recurring theme is task avoidance, in which students with LD deliberately disengage from reading activities. Task avoidance may manifest in behaviors such as refusing to read, avoiding participation in literacy activities, or pretending to read during silent reading periods. Researchers suggest that such behaviors often serve as protective strategies that allow students to maintain a sense of competence while avoiding situations that might expose their reading difficulties (Hall, 2007, 2012; Learned, 2018).

Hall (2012) argued that reducing task avoidance requires classroom environments that allow students to "rewrite" their reading identities. By minimizing stigmatizing labels and providing opportunities for positive literacy experiences, educators can support students in repositioning themselves as capable readers. In a later study, Hall (2016) further linked task avoidance to classroom power dynamics and social positioning. Students identified as strong readers often occupy privileged roles in classroom discourse, while those positioned as weak readers may withdraw or disengage to protect their self-concept.

Together, these two studies highlight the reciprocal relationship between reading identity and motivation. Students who view themselves—or believe others view them—as competent readers are more likely to engage in reading and sustain motivation over time. Conversely, negative perceptions of reading ability may weaken both motivation and identity development. This relationship is particularly relevant to the present study, which seeks to understand how upper-elementary students with learning disabilities in rural environments perceive their reading identities and what factors contribute to those identities.

Reading Identity of Students with Learning Disabilities

Few studies explicitly examine the reading identity of students formally diagnosed with learning disabilities (LD). Instead, most of the research refers broadly to "struggling readers," a category that may include students with a wide range of reading challenges rather than those with identified learning disabilities. Although the terminology differs, several recurring themes emerge across the literature regarding how struggling readers experience reading and develop perceptions of themselves as readers. Two themes particularly relevant to reading identity include effective instructional practices and task avoidance.

Instructional practices designed to support students with learning disabilities often focus on strengthening specific components of reading, including multisyllabic word recognition, vocabulary development, fluency, and comprehension. Recommended approaches include affix instruction, word-building activities, repeated reading of connected text, and explicit instruction in comprehension strategies such as identifying key words, activating background knowledge, and generating and answering inferential questions (Toste et al., 2017). These strategies are widely recognized as effective for improving reading performance among students who experience persistent reading difficulties.

However, effective reading interventions extend beyond the remediation of technical skills (Becnal & Moeller, 2015; Frankel & Fields, 2019; Gerwin, 2021; Skerrett, 2012). Research suggests that instruction must also address the affective dimensions of reading, including students' motivation, engagement, and beliefs about themselves as readers. Pedagogical approaches that provide meaningful reading experiences, opportunities for success, and supportive teacher–student relationships can contribute to more positive perceptions of reading ability. Thus, effective literacy instruction for struggling readers requires attention not only to

skill development but also to the broader motivational and identity-related factors that shape students' engagement with reading.

Additional research highlights the importance of instructional fit in shaping student engagement. Gerwin (2021) found that students' persistence and on-task behavior declined when reading materials were either overly complex or insufficiently engaging. This finding suggests that task avoidance is influenced not only by identity concerns but also by the degree to which instructional materials align with students' interests and reading abilities. Selecting texts that balance appropriate challenge with accessibility may therefore reduce disengagement and support sustained participation in reading activities.

Reading Identity of Upper Elementary Struggling Readers

Across the literature, participants varied widely in age, diagnosis, and geographic context. Most studies examining reading identity have focused on older students, typically adolescents or adults, and were conducted in large urban settings. Additionally, many participants in these studies were not formally diagnosed with learning disabilities but were instead broadly categorized as struggling readers. As a result, relatively little research has focused specifically on upper elementary students or on students formally identified with learning disabilities.

Numerous studies exploring reading identity and motivation have examined adolescent or adult populations in urban contexts (e.g., Alvermann, 2001; Anderson, 2009; Bozack, 2011; Frankel, 2016; Gerwin, 2021; Glenn et al., 2018; Hall, 2007, 2012, 2020; Hikida, 2018; Learned, 2018). These studies were conducted in a variety of educational settings, including an all-boys Catholic high school (Bozack, 2011) and urban high schools where researchers examined the development of both negative and resilient reading identities over time (Frankel, 2016; Hall,

2020). Collectively, this body of research highlights how students' perceptions of themselves as readers are shaped by classroom environments, instructional practices, peer interactions, and broader sociocultural contexts.

Despite these contributions, the literature reveals a notable gap in research focused on upper elementary learners. Few studies investigate how reading identity develops among upper elementary students, particularly those who experience persistent reading difficulties. This gap is significant because upper elementary grades represent a critical stage in literacy development, when students transition from learning to read toward reading to learn (Chall, 1983, 1990) when perceptions of oneself as a reader may become increasingly stable. Understanding how students in these grades interpret their reading experiences may therefore provide important insights into the development of reading identity.

Reading Identity of Students in Rural Educational Settings

One study conducted by Hall (2012) examined reading identity among 52 sixth-grade students in a rural school in the southern United States. The study focused on how students participated in classroom text discussions and whether those interactions differed according to students' reading identities. Hall analyzed the ways students positioned themselves and were positioned by others during discussions about texts, paying particular attention to how students perceived themselves as readers and how those perceptions influenced their participation in classroom discourse. Findings suggested that students who were viewed as strong readers were more likely to contribute actively and confidently to discussions, while students who perceived themselves—or were perceived by peers and teachers—as weaker readers participated less frequently or more cautiously. These patterns reflected broader social dynamics within the

classroom, where reading identity influenced students' willingness to engage with texts and with one another.

Hall's study provides valuable insight into how reading identity shapes students' participation in literacy practices, particularly within classroom discussions. However, it also highlights the limited amount of research conducted in rural settings. While many studies of reading identity have been carried out in urban schools, far fewer have examined students in rural contexts. This lack of research is significant because rural communities often present unique educational and literacy conditions, including geographic isolation, fewer literacy resources, and differing cultural expectations surrounding reading. Consequently, there remains a clear need for additional research that examines how students in rural environments understand and construct their reading identities, particularly among upper elementary learners and those experiencing reading difficulties.

Discussion

Across the literature, a consensus emerged regarding the role of student agency in shaping reading identity. When students were given opportunities to select their reading materials, their reading identities tended to become more positive. However, few studies have focused specifically on students with learning disabilities. For example, Alvermann (2001) examined a student reading below grade level who had not been formally diagnosed with a learning disability and explored how cultural influences and opportunities for choice affected the student's reading identity. Similarly, Becnel and Moeller (2015) investigated the reading agency of 100 high school students in a rural setting using a reading inventory survey. Their findings suggested that adolescents' reading identities were influenced by the geographic and cultural communities to which they belonged. Although this study addressed rural educational contexts, it

did not focus on students with learning disabilities or on upper-elementary students. Frankel (2016) examined two ninth-grade students enrolled in literacy intervention classes who nevertheless identified themselves as good readers. In this case, students emphasized the outcomes associated with being a reader—such as agency and participation—while teachers focused on observable reading behaviors and habits. For these participants, agency appeared to outweigh teachers' perceptions of their reading abilities and contributed to more positive reading identities.

Other research has examined the role of labeling in shaping students' reading identities. Labels such as "struggling reader," whether self-assigned or institutionally imposed, were often associated with reduced self-efficacy and more negative reading identities. Frankel (2016) emphasized the importance of students' self-identification in shaping how they perceived themselves as readers. Similarly, Gerwin (2021) studied nine fifth-grade students in an urban school to examine the influence of reading-leveling practices on students' affective experiences with reading, noting that reading identity is often shaped through the social structures of schooling. Although the participants were not identified with learning disabilities, students who perceived themselves as "bad readers" tended to develop negative reading identities. Likewise, Skerrett (2012) found that ninth-grade students positioned by standardized test scores as reading below grade level often internalized these classifications, resulting in reading identities aligned with those of struggling readers. Collectively, these findings suggest that labels such as "struggling reader" or "learning disability" may influence how students perceive themselves as readers and may contribute to the development of negative reading identities.

Two studies examined reading motivation and how students' reading identities corresponded with their perceptions of teachers' evaluations of reading ability. McCarthey

(2001) studied 12 fifth-grade students from diverse cultural backgrounds attending a Texas school that served urban, suburban, and rural populations. All participants qualified for free or reduced-price lunch, indicating lower socioeconomic status. Two primary conclusions emerged: first, students' perceptions of parents, peers, teachers, and themselves influenced the development of reading identity; second, successful readers tended to demonstrate higher motivation to read, whereas students who struggled with reading were less motivated and more likely to pursue interests outside of school.

Bozack (2011) examined adolescent reading motivation using the Motivations for Reading Questionnaire (MRQ) with 330 students in Grades 9–11 at an urban, single-sex school. The study found that as students' motivations for reading evolved over time, their reading identities also changed. When teachers explicitly acknowledged and validated students' reading identities, students reported greater enjoyment of in-school reading. Together, these studies demonstrate a relationship between reading motivation and reading identity; however, neither examined upper-elementary students with learning disabilities in rural settings.

Despite the prevalence of reading difficulties among students with learning disabilities, much of the existing research on reading identity focuses on adolescents or adults, often in urban contexts, and frequently includes students broadly described as struggling readers rather than those formally diagnosed with learning disabilities. As a result, the experiences and perspectives of upper-elementary students with learning disabilities in rural environments remain underrepresented in the literature.

Understanding reading identity during the upper-elementary years is particularly important because this developmental stage represents a critical transition in literacy learning. During these grades, students move from learning to read toward reading to learn, and their

perceptions of themselves as readers often become more stable and influential in shaping future academic engagement. When students repeatedly encounter difficulty with reading tasks—especially in instructional environments that emphasize speed, accuracy, or comparison with peers—they may internalize negative beliefs about their reading ability. Such experiences can influence whether students approach reading with confidence and persistence or disengage from literacy activities.

Scholars emphasize the importance of culturally relevant instruction that builds on students' background knowledge, lived experiences, and local environments (Becnel & Moeller, 2015; Glenn et al., 2018; Hall, 2020; McCarthey, 2001; Skerrett, 2012). For students living in rural communities—often characterized by geographic isolation, limited access to literacy resources, and socioeconomic challenges—context plays a critical role in shaping opportunities to engage with reading. These contextual conditions may be particularly significant for students with learning disabilities, who frequently require specialized instruction and sustained support to develop foundational and independent reading skills.

Overall, the literature highlights a need for research that centers the perspectives of upper-elementary students with learning disabilities in rural environments. Although prior studies have explored reading identity and motivation, few have examined how these factors interact for students formally diagnosed with learning disabilities during the critical transition from learning to read to reading to learn. Existing research has largely focused on adolescents, urban contexts, or students broadly described as struggling readers rather than those with identified learning disabilities. As a result, limited attention has been given to how upper-elementary students with learning disabilities in rural settings perceive themselves as readers and how contextual factors influence the development of their reading identities. Addressing this gap

may provide important insight into how instructional practices, social contexts, and motivational supports shape literacy experiences for these learners. Understanding these perspectives may ultimately inform instructional approaches that foster both reading achievement and the development of positive reading identities among students with learning disabilities in rural schools.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed literature related to reading identity among students with learning disabilities in rural environments. Despite growing recognition of the importance of motivation, self-perception, and context in shaping reading identity, the perspectives of rural upper elementary students with learning disabilities remain largely absent from the literature. Few studies center the voices of these learners or explore how they interpret their own reading experiences. This gap highlights the need for research that examines how students with learning disabilities in rural environments understand reading and construct their identities as readers. The present study addresses this need by exploring the reading identities of rural fourth- and fifth-grade students with learning disabilities, thereby extending existing literacy research and informing instructional practices that support both reading development and positive reader identities.

To investigate this phenomenon, a qualitative descriptive research design was selected to capture students' perspectives and experiences in their own words. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology used in this study, including the research design, participant selection, data collection procedures, and methods of data analysis used to examine how rural upper elementary students with learning disabilities perceive and construct their reading identities.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to investigate how upper-elementary students with learning disabilities in a rural community perceive their reading identities and the factors that influence them. The chapter begins with the research design and rationale, followed by descriptions of the research setting, participant selection, data collection procedures, and data analysis methods. It concludes with a discussion of trustworthiness and ethical considerations.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do rural upper elementary students with a learning disability view their reading identity?

RQ2: What key factors influence their reading identity?

Research Methodology

Qualitative research provides a framework for exploring and interpreting complex social phenomena within educational contexts. From this perspective, knowledge is understood as socially constructed through individuals' interactions, experiences, and participation in particular social and cultural contexts (Mallette & Duke, 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative inquiry is well-suited to addressing the "what," "how," and "why" questions that characterize complex educational experiences (Bloomberg, 2023; Merriam, 2001). In this study, a qualitative approach enabled an in-depth examination of how students with learning disabilities perceive themselves as readers, interpret their reading experiences, and construct their reading identities.

A qualitative descriptive methodology was employed to examine how rural fourth- and fifth-grade students with learning disabilities (LD) make meaning of their experiences as readers.

Participants were drawn from a low–socioeconomic rural community and had been formally identified with an LD. This interpretive qualitative approach allowed for a detailed exploration of students' literacy experiences and provided insight into the types of reading they considered meaningful, the motivations that influenced their engagement with reading, and how they understood themselves as readers.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore participants' perspectives on their reading identities. This design is well-suited for capturing participants' experiences in rich detail while remaining closely aligned with their own words and interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It also emphasizes the importance of context, situating participants' understandings of themselves as readers within the rural school and community environments in which they live and learn.

Several features informed this design. Participant recruitment was conducted in collaboration with school district administrators. I met with the superintendent, principal, and special education director to explain the purpose of the study. The special education director identified seven students with learning disabilities as potential participants. I subsequently contacted these families via email and scheduled an in-person meeting at the school to provide additional information and respond to questions prior to obtaining consent. Written parental consent and student assent were obtained from three students, who comprised the final participant sample for this study.

Data collection occurred within the school setting over several days, allowing for sustained engagement and familiarity with participants' everyday contexts.

Second, multiple forms of data were collected to develop a comprehensive understanding of students' reading identities. Participants completed two surveys (Appendices C and D) that provided structured insights into their perceptions of reading. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with each participant (Appendix E), allowing for in-depth exploration of their beliefs and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Galletta, 2013). Finally, participants created drawings depicting themselves as readers both inside and outside school (Appendix B). Visual representations such as drawings can reveal students' perceptions and emotions about reading that may not emerge through verbal responses alone (Chapman et al., 2010). Together, these data sources—surveys, interviews, and drawings—allowed for triangulation and a more comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping students' reading identities.

Third, data analysis incorporated both inductive and deductive approaches (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data were organized, coded, and interpreted through an iterative process in which themes were developed by moving between the data and the theoretical frameworks guiding the study. Findings from each data source were compared and integrated to produce a coherent interpretation of participants' experiences.

Finally, reflexivity and bracketing were maintained throughout the research process (Tufford & Newman, 2012). I engaged in bracketing by intentionally setting aside my preunderstandings and assumptions about the participants' reading identities and the factors that shaped their reading experiences. Because I have taught students with learning disabilities for many years and have often observed negative attitudes toward reading, I initially anticipated that the participants in this study would express similar views. However, I deliberately set aside this assumption. By bracketing my prior experiences as a teacher of students with learning

disabilities, I was better able to attend to and accurately represent the participants' descriptions of their own reading experiences.

Another example of reflexivity emerged in my field notes during Damien's interview. After one of his responses, I wrote a question in the margin asking whether the task he described was difficult for him. Based on my teaching experience, I assumed he might struggle to stay focused, as many of my former students had difficulty remaining on task. Recognizing this assumption, I intentionally bracketed my prior teaching experiences and asked Damien directly whether it was hard for him to stay on task. He responded, "Not really," which challenged my initial assumption and reminded me to rely on the participant's perspective rather than my own prior experiences. This process reflects reflexive practice, in which the researcher continually examines assumptions and potential influences on data collection and interpretation.

A second example of bracketing and reflexivity occurred during my interview with K.J. when discussing her reading in school and outside of school. Based on my prior experience, I expected her to describe reading similarly across both contexts. However, after setting aside this assumption, K.J. explained, "I don't read outside like in school," indicating that her perception of reading differed significantly depending on the environment. This example further illustrates the importance of bracketing assumptions so that participants' perspectives, rather than the researcher's prior experiences, guide interpretation.

These examples demonstrate how reflexivity and bracketing were used throughout the study to reduce the influence of my prior experiences and assumptions as a teacher of students with learning disabilities. By intentionally examining my assumptions and returning to participants' words for clarification, I worked to ensure that the findings reflected the participants' perspectives rather than my own expectations. This ongoing reflexive process

contributed to the credibility and trustworthiness of the study by increasing the accuracy of interpretation and supporting a more authentic representation of participants' experiences.

Ethical rigor was further supported through careful attention to participants' well-being and confidentiality. Electronic files were stored on password-protected devices, paper documents were secured in a locked cabinet, and all materials will be destroyed following the designated retention period.

Overall, the qualitative descriptive design provided a flexible yet systematic framework for capturing participants' voices and contextualizing their experiences as readers within their rural educational environment.

Community Setting

Because reading identity develops within social and environmental contexts, describing the community in which participants live provides important insight into the literacy opportunities, resources, and experiences that may influence how students perceive themselves as readers.

Participants in this study reside in a rural community characterized by low socioeconomic status. The area is located along the banks of a large lake and includes farmhouses, log cabins, and mobile homes situated on spacious wooded lots, many with barns and agricultural land. A central state highway connects the community to surrounding areas, while most residential neighborhoods are accessed by unpaved rural roads. Community infrastructure is limited and includes a church, a community center, a gas station, and a casino.

The community center operates under the larger town's parks and recreation department and is open weekdays from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. It provides outdoor recreational activities and occasional indoor programming, such as bingo, story time, and a monthly food pantry. Despite

these resources, the local elementary school functions as the primary hub of community activity, serving as a gathering place for families and community leaders during school-related events.

Socioeconomic indicators suggest significant economic challenges within the community. Approximately 73% of students are classified as economically disadvantaged (U.S. News & World Report, 2023). Additionally, 256 students receive Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits or other forms of government assistance, and all students qualify for free breakfast and lunch at school. Chronic absenteeism has also been identified as a concern within the district (School Report Cards, n.d.).

Limited access to literacy resources further shapes students' learning environments. The community does not have a dedicated public library. Instead, the community center functions as a book pickup and drop-off location for regional library services and provides limited on-site collections and internet access between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. During the summer months, the center hosts occasional read-aloud sessions for young children. These constraints are consistent with broader patterns in high-poverty, rural communities, where access to library resources is often more limited than in more affluent areas. Restricted access to books and literacy resources may negatively affect students' academic performance and literacy development (Pribesh et al., 2011).

The characteristics of this rural community provide an important contextual backdrop for understanding students' literacy experiences and the development of their reading identities. Geographic isolation, limited access to literacy resources, and high levels of economic disadvantage shape the environments in which students encounter reading both inside and outside of school. Within such contexts, opportunities to engage with books, observe models of reading from community members, and develop confidence as readers may be constrained. For

students with learning disabilities, these conditions may further influence their expectations for success, the value they assign to reading activities, and their perceptions of themselves as readers. Examining reading identity within this setting therefore provides insight into how environmental conditions, educational experiences, and motivational beliefs interact to shape the reading identities of upper-elementary students with learning disabilities in rural communities.

School Setting

New Haven Elementary School is a rural public school located in the south-central United States. According to the most recent official data available (2019–2020), the school employed 35 full-time general education teachers, three special education teachers, and one full-time school counselor (IES: NCES, n.d.; Office of Educational Quality and Accountability, n.d.; U.S. News & World Report, n.d.). More than 16% of the elementary student population was enrolled in special education, and approximately 8.5% of the district's budget was allocated to student support services.

The school currently serves approximately 568 students in grades PK–5. The student population includes 53 Native American, 4 African American, 88 Hispanic, 1 Pacific Islander, and 325 White students. At the upper-elementary level, there are 89 fourth-grade students and 88 fifth-grade students. Overall, 41% of the student population identifies as a racial or ethnic minority. Academic achievement data indicate that only 16% of students tested at or above the proficient level in reading, while 84% performed below proficiency. The school maintains a student–teacher ratio of approximately 14:1.

Although these statistics reflect official records, current staffing patterns have shifted due to faculty attrition and local constraints. At the time of this study, the school employed 30 general education teachers, four full-time special education teachers, and three reading teachers.

The school no longer had a full-time counselor, and administrative staff assumed many counseling responsibilities. Of the three reading teachers, two were former general education teachers who received on-the-job training in reading instruction, while one was a certified reading specialist with a master's degree in reading.

Instructional support is organized through a Response to Intervention (RTI) framework using a three-tiered model for targeted instruction. All students participate in a daily 30-minute intervention block referred to as *What I Need* (WIN). During this time, students receive reteaching or reading remediation in small groups, with the smallest groups consisting of approximately ten students. Because of the high number of students requiring support, some groups include both Tier II and Tier III students.

Administrative roles extend beyond traditional leadership responsibilities due to staffing limitations. For example, the vice principal also serves as counselor and psychometrist, conducting testing for students referred to special education. The reading specialist coordinates the school's reading program, teaches remedial groups, serves as Dean of Students, and oversees aspects of curriculum development.

These contextual conditions illustrate both the resourcefulness of the school and the challenges associated with staffing and resource limitations in rural educational settings. The high percentage of students performing below reading proficiency, combined with limited specialized personnel, creates a context in which reading difficulties are widespread. For upper-elementary students with learning disabilities, these challenges may be further intensified by increasing academic demands, frequent regrouping under the RTI framework, and limited access to specialized literacy support services. Examining students' perspectives within this context provides important insight into how rural learners with LD understand their reading experiences

and construct their identities as readers. Participants in this study were drawn from this school community. The following section describes the criteria used to identify eligible students and the procedures used to recruit them.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Following Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I recruited participants from New Haven Elementary School. I am familiar with this research site, having previously taught reading strategies to fourth- and fifth-grade students as part of my university coursework. In a prior experience, I worked with a small group of students with learning disabilities (LD) over several weeks, using digital literacy practices to support reading development. For example, the group read *Military Dogs* by Sara Green on GetEpic.com, a text that resonated with them because of family military connections, personal interest in dogs, and accessible vocabulary. Students valued the small-group environment, which encouraged questions, and enjoyed working online, which enhanced their motivation to read. This prior engagement provided me with insight into the population I now seek to study more formally.

The site superintendent, principal, and teachers have a history of collaborating with researchers from the local university and granted me permission to conduct this study. My professional relationships with faculty and administrators at the site—including the reading specialist, with whom I co-taught an Intermediate Reading course at the university—helped facilitate access and trust. The principal and superintendent approved my presence on campus to recruit participants and conduct the study.

Participants were selected through a collaborative process involving the school's special education director, reading specialist, classroom teachers, and principal. Eligible students were those enrolled in fourth or fifth grade and identified with learning disabilities. Classroom

teachers assisted in identifying families of potential participants, after which I arranged meetings with parents or guardians to introduce the study, explain its purpose, and obtain written consent. Students were also asked individually for their verbal and written assent. Only those whose parents consented and who provided assent were included.

The decision to focus on fourth- and fifth-grade students was intentional. By this age, students have had several years of literacy instruction and thus have begun to form reading identities. At the same time, there is little research that directly examines the reading identities of rural students with LD at this developmental stage. Much of the existing scholarship has instead emphasized the perspectives of teachers and administrators (Broaddus & Bloodgood, 2011; Duffy, 1999; McCutchen et al., 2009; Scammacca et al., 2015), or focused on urban and suburban contexts (Guthrie & Klauda, 2014; McClelland, 2015; Wigfield & Guthrie, 2000), leaving a gap in the literature that this study seeks to address (Ferdman, 1990; Hall, 2010, 2016).

All site and participant names were changed to protect confidentiality. To foster a sense of agency, students were invited to select their own pseudonyms. Given that LD encompasses a spectrum of abilities, I adopted a flexible approach to participation. For example, survey questions were read aloud to students who needed additional support, and interview questions were rephrased as necessary for clarity and comprehension. Participation in this study was voluntary, and students were reminded that they could withdraw at any time without penalty. All three students who agreed to participate continued to stay in the study.

Data Sources and Collection Procedures

Qualitative research relies on multiple forms of data to develop a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives and the themes that emerge during analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, data were collected from three sources: semi-structured interviews,

survey responses, and student drawings accompanied by participant explanations (Table 2). The interview questions, the surveys, and the drawing protocols are all provided in the appendices. Using multiple sources supported triangulation and provided a richer understanding of how students perceived their reading identities.

Table 2

Data Sources as They Relate to Research Questions

Research Questions	Data Sources
Q1: How do rural upper elementary students with LD view their reading identity?	Semi-structured interviews Survey responses Drawings
Q2: What key factors influence their reading identity?	Semi-structured interviews Survey responses Drawings

Data collection occurred over three days—April 15, 16, and 17—in a quiet space within the school. Each participant engaged in three activities: an individual semi-structured interview (approximately 40 minutes), survey administration (approximately 30 minutes), and a drawing activity (approximately 30 minutes) (Table 3).

Table 3

Data Collection Schedule

Data Type	Date	Duration per Session	Location
Interviews	April 15	40 minutes per participant	Quiet room in school
Surveys (RSPS & MRP-R)	April 16	30 minutes per participant	Quiet room in school
Drawings	April 17	30 minutes per participant	Quiet room in school

Semi-Structured Interviews

The first data source consisted of individual semi-structured interviews (Appendix E). Interviews were conducted in a quiet setting within the school and scheduled in collaboration with classroom teachers. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes.

Semi-structured interviewing allowed me to maintain a consistent set of guiding questions while also providing flexibility to explore emerging ideas and clarify participants' responses (Galletta, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interviews began with rapport-building questions before moving to prompts focused on participants' reading experiences, beliefs about reading, and perceptions of themselves as readers. This approach allowed participants to describe their reading experiences at home and at school while ensuring alignment with the study's research questions. Interviews were audio-recorded and manually transcribed to ensure accuracy and familiarity with the data.

The interview process also required reflexivity in relation to participants' expressive and receptive language abilities. For example, during Damien's interview, many of his responses were brief and required follow-up questions and rephrasing to elicit more detailed responses. In my field notes, I documented my hesitation about providing too much prompting, noting, "Needs lots of prompting but will it change his answers?" This reflects a methodological tension between supporting participants' communication needs and avoiding leading responses. To address this, I asked open-ended questions and, when necessary, rephrased questions or provided examples to support comprehension while attempting to avoid suggesting specific answers.

Similarly, K.J. demonstrated difficulty with expressive language and word retrieval, often attempting to answer questions but struggling to fully explain her responses. My field notes noted delayed expressive language and difficulty finding words. As a result, I asked the same

question in multiple ways to support her ability to communicate her ideas. These strategies were not intended to lead participants but to provide multiple opportunities for them to express their perspectives.

In contrast, Stella's interviews presented a different challenge. She was highly verbal and often shared detailed stories that were not always directly related to the interview questions. While her responses occasionally moved off topic, they provided important contextual information about her home life and literacy experiences. Interviewing Stella therefore required redirecting the conversation while still allowing space for her to share experiences that were meaningful to her.

These differences among participants highlight the importance of flexibility in semi-structured interviewing, particularly when working with students with learning disabilities. The interview process required ongoing reflexivity, adaptation, and responsiveness to participants' communication styles in order to accurately capture their perspectives while minimizing researcher influence on their responses. These adaptations are consistent with qualitative interviewing practices that emphasize flexibility, responsiveness, and attention to participants' communication needs (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Survey Responses

The second data source consisted of two survey instruments: the *Reader Self-Perception Scale* (RSPS) and the *Motivation to Read Profile–Revised* (MRP-R) (Appendices C and D). Both surveys were administered individually in a quiet location within the school. These instruments provided insight into how students perceived reading and how they viewed themselves as readers.

The RSPS (Henk & Melnick, 1995) measures students' self-perceptions as readers and is grounded in Bandura's (1982) theory of self-efficacy. It was created for use with intermediate-level children in grades 4, 5, and 6, to focus on how students in the middle of their school career feel about themselves as readers, though it has been used in international studies across various age ranges. The instrument includes one general item and 32 items organized into four dimensions: progress, observational comparison, social feedback, and physiological states. Students respond using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The survey requires approximately 15–20 minutes to complete. Reported reliability coefficients range from .81 to .84 (Henk & Melnick, 1995).

The MRP-R was originally developed by Gambrell et al. (1995) and later revised by Malloy et al. (2013). Designed for all elementary school children in grades 2 through 6**,** it assesses reading motivation through self-concept and value of reading, using a reading survey and a conversational interview. The instrument assesses two dimensions of reading motivation: self-concept as a reader and the value students assign to reading. Only the survey portion of the instrument was used in this study. Administration required approximately 20–25 minutes, and scores were calculated for each subscale and combined into a total score. Previous research reported an alpha coefficient of .87 (Malloy et al., 2014). The MRP-R aligns conceptually with expectancy-value theory (Eccles, 1983), which informs the theoretical framework of this study.

Together, the RSPS and MRP-R provided complementary insights into students' reading motivation, self-perceptions, and affective experiences with reading. While the RSPS captured students' perceptions of their reading competence and self-concept as readers, the MRP-R measured key dimensions of reading motivation, including intrinsic and extrinsic influences on reading engagement. Using both instruments allowed for a more comprehensive understanding

of how students viewed their reading abilities and how those perceptions related to their motivation to read.

Student Drawings

The final data source consisted of students' drawings of themselves as readers both inside and outside of school (Appendix B). Each participant completed the drawing activity individually in a quiet room within the school.

Participants were provided with sketch paper, colored pencils, and markers and were asked to draw themselves as readers. Drawing served as a visual method for representing reading identity and allowed students to communicate ideas that might be difficult to express verbally. Each drawing session lasted approximately 30 minutes and was followed by a short discussion in which participants explained the meaning of their drawings.

Because reading identity is an abstract concept, visual representation can provide concrete access to how individuals understand their identities (Beauregard et al., 2017). Drawings also provided a focal point for conversation and allowed participants to elaborate on feelings and experiences that might otherwise remain unexpressed (Beauregard et al., 2017; Chapman et al., 2010). The drawings therefore complemented the survey and interview data and contributed an additional layer of insight into participants' reading identities.

Each participant met with the researcher on three occasions: first to participate in an individual interview, then to complete the surveys, and finally to complete the drawing activity. This sequence moved from a concrete and creative activity to increasingly reflective forms of data collection.

Field notes were recorded during and immediately after each session to capture contextual details not evident in the transcripts or survey responses. These notes included the

date, time, and location of the session; observations of participant behavior; and reflections on emotional or contextual factors that might influence interpretation of the data. Field notes also served as a reflexive record to support the research process.

All data were stored securely to protect participant confidentiality. Electronic files were maintained on a password-protected computer, and paper documents were stored in a locked cabinet. At the end of the required retention period, paper records will be shredded and digital files permanently deleted.

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis

I conducted a reflexive thematic analysis of the qualitative data, including interview transcripts and students' drawings with their verbal explanations (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Thematic analysis is an iterative process that involves moving between the dataset and emerging codes to identify patterns of meaning. The analysis followed the six phases outlined by Braun and Clarke.

Phase One: Familiarization

I immersed myself in the data by reading and re-reading interview transcripts and participants' descriptions of their drawings. This process allowed me to develop a deep understanding of each participant's voice and perspective. During this stage, I noted meaningful segments of text and highlighted statements related to students' perceptions of themselves as readers.

Phase Two: Generating Codes

Using open coding, I examined the data line by line to identify key concepts and assign initial codes that captured participants' ideas without imposing predetermined categories

(Merriam, 2001). Codes were refined through repeated review of the transcripts, survey responses, and drawing descriptions to ensure they accurately represented participants' perspectives. Throughout this process, I wrote analytic memos to document coding decisions, emerging patterns, and preliminary interpretations (Saldaña, 2021). Examples of code generation are provided in Table 4.

Table 4

Coding the Data

Data	Example	Code
Interview	"I like reading at home."	Positive attitude
RSPS	Family thinks I'm a good reader	Family support
Drawing	Reading in bedroom at home	Comfort
Field notes	Smiling when talking about home reading	Positive emotional response

Phase Three: Searching for Themes

During Phase Three, I examined relationships among the initial codes to identify broader patterns of meaning across the data. Codes that were conceptually related were grouped into categories, which allowed preliminary themes to emerge. This process involved looking for patterns across participants and across multiple data sources, including interviews, drawings, survey responses, and field notes. I used lists and tables to organize codes into potential themes and subthemes and to visualize how codes clustered together.

For example, several codes related to reading at home, family support, comfort, and positive reading experiences were grouped together to form a broader category related to the home reading environment. Similarly, codes related to difficulty, frustration, evaluation, and school-based reading tasks were grouped into a category related to school reading experiences.

By grouping related codes into categories, broader themes began to emerge that reflected patterns in how participants described their reading experiences across contexts.

Phase Four: Reviewing Themes

During Phase Four, I returned to the entire dataset to evaluate how well the preliminary themes represented patterns across participants' experiences. This involved re-reading interview transcripts, reviewing drawings, re-examining survey responses, and revisiting field notes to ensure that the themes accurately reflected the data. I compared the themes against the coded data extracts and the full dataset to determine whether the themes were coherent, distinct, and well supported by the data.

During this process, some themes were refined, combined, or eliminated to ensure clarity and accuracy. I also examined whether the themes meaningfully captured the participants' experiences and addressed the research questions guiding the study. This recursive process helped ensure that the final themes represented consistent patterns across participants rather than isolated examples. This phase aligns with Braun and Clarke's (2020) recommendation that themes should be internally consistent, distinct from one another, and strongly grounded in the data.

For example, the theme related to the home reading environment was reviewed by returning to all data sources to determine whether the theme was consistently supported across participants. I re-read interview transcripts and identified excerpts in which participants described reading at home as comfortable, self-directed, or enjoyable. I also reviewed survey responses that participants rated positively. I revisited participants' drawings and noted that each participant depicted home reading environments in positive ways, often including comfortable furniture, family pets, or relaxed settings. By reviewing the interview data, survey responses, and

drawings together, I confirmed that the theme of home as a positive reading environment was supported across multiple data sources and across participants. This review process helped ensure that the theme was grounded in the full dataset rather than based on isolated examples.

Phase Five: Defining and Naming Themes

During Phase Five, each theme was carefully defined and named to capture its central idea and clarify its relationship to the study's research questions. This stage involved refining the boundaries of each theme, determining what was included and excluded within each theme, and identifying how each theme contributed to understanding participants' reading identities. I wrote a brief description of each theme and selected representative examples from interviews, drawings, and survey data to illustrate the meaning of each theme.

For example, one theme was defined as the influence of home environment on reading identity. This theme included codes related to comfort, choice, family support, and positive reading experiences at home. This theme was defined as the ways in which the home environment provided a space where participants felt more relaxed, autonomous, and confident as readers compared to school settings. The theme was named to reflect the broader idea that reading identity is shaped by context, particularly the differences between home and school reading environments.

Phase Six: Writing and Interpretation

In the final phase, the coded data, themes, and analytic memos were synthesized to construct a coherent narrative of the findings. The interpretation remained grounded in participants' voices while connecting the results to the study's research questions and theoretical framework.

The thematic analysis was guided by the study's research questions, which explored how rural fourth- and fifth-grade students with learning disabilities perceive their reading identities and the factors that contribute to those identities. Throughout the analytic process, particular attention was given to participants' descriptions of their reading experiences, their perceptions of themselves as readers, and the contextual influences that shaped those perceptions. Examining these patterns across data sources helped illuminate how motivational beliefs, personal experiences, and environmental factors interacted in the development of students' reading identities.

Survey analyses from the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) and the Motivation to Read Profile–Revised (MRP-R) provided complementary quantitative insights into students' reading motivation and self-perceptions. The qualitative data from interviews and drawings were analyzed thematically. Triangulating these data sources allowed for cross-checking findings and developing a more comprehensive understanding of how rural fourth- and fifth-grade students with learning disabilities perceive and construct their reading identities.

Analysis of Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS)

Data from the RSPS (Henk & Melnick, 1995) were also scored and analyzed using procedures outlined by the instrument developers. Student pseudonyms were listed in the first column of an Excel spreadsheet, with headings for each of the four subscales: progress, observational comparison, social feedback, and physiological states. Raw scores for each subscale were calculated by summing responses across items, following the scoring sheet provided. These raw scores were then compared with the norming table supplied by the instrument developers.

Although the RSPS provided primarily quantitative descriptive data, I also considered response patterns qualitatively. By examining consistencies and differences across participants, I was able to interpret how students' self-perceptions as readers related to the broader themes that emerged from the drawings and interviews.

Analysis of Motivation to Read Profile–Revised (MRP-R)

Data from the MRP-R were scored and analyzed according to the guidelines provided by the instrument developers (Malloy et al., 2014). I created a CSV document (comma separated values), listing participants' pseudonyms in the first column and survey items across the top row. Using the scoring directions, I recorded each student's response, assigning numerical values to each item. Odd-numbered items contributed to the self-concept score, and even-numbered items contributed to the value-of-reading score. A total score was obtained by summing these two sub scores. The scoring table is provided in Appendix C.

Outlier scores, whether unusually high or low, were highlighted in yellow for closer examination. I reviewed scores both individually and collectively, looking for patterns and trends across the group. Observed patterns were recorded as notes at the bottom of the spreadsheet, providing an additional interpretive layer to the quantitative data.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study had several limitations. First, parental consent influenced the number of participants. Some parents were reluctant to allow their children to participate, while others may have misunderstood the purpose of the study and declined consent. As a result, the participant pool was small. The size of the school also limited the number of available participants, as relatively few fourth- and fifth-grade students had been formally identified with a learning disability.

Second, the quality of the data depended on the extent to which students were comfortable and forthcoming in their responses. It is possible that some students were hesitant to share their true thoughts during surveys or interviews. To address this, I worked to establish rapport with each participant by openly discussing the study's purpose and emphasizing how their voices could contribute to improving literacy instruction for students like themselves. While efforts were made to create a safe and supportive environment, the possibility of guarded or incomplete responses remained a limitation.

This study also had delimitations. The focus was restricted to upper elementary students in grades four and five who had been formally identified with a learning disability and who attended school in a rural community. These choices reflected my professional experiences teaching reading strategies to students at this age and my interest in exploring how rural context intersects with reading identity. As such, the study did not include younger elementary students, middle school students, or students with other types of learning differences.

Ethical Considerations

This study demonstrated reliability, trustworthiness, and adherence to ethical standards through several methodological practices designed to ensure the rigor and integrity of the research process. Qualitative research requires careful attention to transparency, reflexivity, and systematic procedures to establish credibility and dependability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, strategies such as triangulation of multiple data sources, reflexive field notes, systematic data analysis, and careful documentation of research procedures were used to strengthen the trustworthiness of the findings. In addition, ethical guidelines were followed throughout the study to protect participants' rights, privacy, and well-being.

Positionality and Reflexivity

I outlined my background, assumptions, worldviews, and theoretical orientation as part of my reflexive practice (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By explicitly acknowledging these factors, I critically examined how they could influence the interpretation of data. My prior teaching experience with this population gave me insider status, which provided familiarity with the context and the needs of students with learning disabilities. At the same time, I remained attentive to the ways in which my positionality could shape the research process. Reflexivity involved a continuous effort to remain open to participants' thoughts, feelings, and perspectives, even when they challenged my expectations or assumptions. I acknowledged the inherent power relations between researcher and participants and sought to minimize imbalances through rapport-building and student choice (e.g., selecting their pseudonyms).

Thick Description

I provided detailed descriptions of each participant, drawing directly on their words and incorporating contextual observations. Using rich, thick description allowed for more accurate interpretation of the findings and enhanced transferability by situating participants' experiences within the broader rural and school context. Direct quotations preserved the authenticity of participants' voices and highlighted the complexity of their perspectives on reading identity.

Protection of Vulnerable Participants

Because the participants were children identified with LD, they represented a vulnerable population. During all data collection sessions, I carefully monitored their emotional and behavioral responses. If a student became upset or uncomfortable, I paused the session and, if necessary, rescheduled or discontinued their participation. Students were reminded throughout the study that their involvement was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time without consequence. This approach prioritized student well-being and protected participants from harm.

Alignment of Data with Research Questions

Trustworthiness was further supported through the alignment of all data collection methods—surveys, drawings, and semi-structured interviews—with the study's research questions. Each method was intentionally selected to elicit information directly related to the central inquiry into students' reading identities. This alignment strengthened the coherence of the research design and supported the development of findings that were both meaningful and credible.

This chapter described the methodological framework used to explore how rural fourth- and fifth-grade students with learning disabilities perceived their reading identities. A qualitative descriptive design was employed to capture students' perspectives and provide a nuanced account of their lived experiences within a rural school context.

Chapter Summary

The chapter outlined the research setting, participant selection, and recruitment procedures, followed by detailed descriptions of the data collection methods, including surveys (MRP-R and RSPS), semi-structured interviews, and student drawings. Field notes were also used to document observations and researcher reflections throughout the data collection process. Data analysis procedures were explained, including the scoring and interpretation of survey instruments and the use of reflexive thematic analysis to code, categorize, and identify themes within the qualitative data. The use of multiple data sources allowed for triangulation, thereby strengthening the credibility and depth of the findings.

Issues of trustworthiness, ethical considerations, limitations, and delimitations were also addressed. Although the study involved a small number of participants and relied partly on self-reported data, the careful research design, reflexive practices, and multiple sources of data helped

mitigate these limitations. The delimitations of the study—focusing on rural fourth- and fifth-grade students with SLD—were aligned with both the research questions and the researcher's professional interests in literacy instruction and student motivation.

In summary, this chapter established the methodological consideration for the study. Chapter 4 presents participant profiles and findings from thematic analysis, to illustrate how students understand and construct their reading identities and the factors that influence their literacy experiences.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings derived from the analysis of the study's data. I begin with detailed descriptions of the three participants: Damien, K.J., and Stella. Due to HIPAA and privacy considerations, I did not access the students' individual education plans, nor was I provided with information regarding their specific diagnoses beyond the knowledge that each child had been identified with a learning disability (LD). Following participant descriptions, I discuss the themes that emerged from data analysis. These themes reflect participants' understandings of reading, the affective experiences associated with reading, and the factors that impact reading identity.

The research questions that this study aims to answer are:

1. How do rural upper elementary students with a learning disability view their reading identity?

2. What key factors influence their reading identity?

Participant Profiles

Through interviews, survey responses, and drawings, the participants revealed aspects of their identities, families, cultural backgrounds, and experiences with reading in school and out of school. To establish context for the themes that follow, I will first present background information on each of the three participants.

Damien

Damien was a quiet and thoughtful 10-year-old African American fourth grader who reported a strong interest in sports, particularly basketball, and engaged in daily Bible reading at home. He was slight in stature, neatly groomed, with dark skin and short red dreadlocks. At the time of the interview, he was dressed in a black Nike hoodie, well-worn jeans, and Nike

sneakers. Before entering the room, he knocked politely, signaling both respect for privacy and assurance that he had arrived at the correct location.

During the interview, Damien presented with a reserved and relaxed demeanor. He frequently reclined in his chair, at times leaning far back as though lying down. His speech was quiet, often approaching a whisper, and typically consisted of short, one-word responses. Additional elaboration generally required prompting; however, when discussing topics of personal significance—such as basketball—his face brightened, and he sat up and responded with increased detail and enthusiasm.

Damien lived with his mother and father in their rural family home, where the home language was English. He also had three teenage half-brothers living elsewhere whom he saw infrequently. Beyond these comments, he provided limited information regarding his family relationships, and further details required direct questioning.

When I asked about pets, Damien said he had dogs. I wondered how many, and he said eight, all different breeds, but no single dog was his favorite. His responsibilities at home included feeding the dogs, letting them outside, and taking them for walks after school.

Damien identified two primary after-school activities of personal significance: playing basketball and reading the Bible. Basketball emerged as his preferred sport, and he participated in a community team, Ball Out Elite. He most frequently played the shooting guard position and expressed confidence in his ability to score, stating, “I am a good shooter.” Damien has participated in multiple community-based basketball leagues over the past several years and articulated an aspiration to join the high school basketball team in the future.

In addition to his athletic involvement, Damien described daily Bible reading as an essential personal practice. He noted that he typically engaged in this activity independently at home, often choosing to read outdoors in a quiet natural setting, such as beneath a tree in his yard.

Damien did not have a computer available for use at home and reported no interaction with social media. However, he indicated that he played video games and was eager to talk about them. He was unable to name the specific games he played, explaining that he had difficulty remembering their titles.

Damien had attended this elementary school from first through fourth grade and reported that he liked it. As he explained, “I like school. It’s fun. I get to meet people. I get to read—I love math, reading, language arts, and science.” He indicated that he liked his teacher, although he did not express strong enthusiasm about her. There were 27 students in his fourth-grade class, and when asked about friends in his class, he could not think of any of their names. His desk was located next to the teacher’s desk in the classroom, along with another student who also sat nearby. When asked how he felt about this seating arrangement, he stated that he felt “good” and “more calm” sitting near the teacher rather than near other students.

Damien exhibited behaviors suggestive of both receptive and expressive language challenges. Although he did not request clarification of my questions, he often paused, frowned, and appeared uncertain about the intended meaning, which exemplified his receptive language challenges. On several occasions, I rephrased questions or provided prompts with possible examples, after which he responded more readily. This type of scaffolding is characteristic of interactions with students who experience language difficulties, as it provides additional context that supports comprehension and response formulation.

In terms of expressive language, many of Damien's responses consisted of one-word or yes/no answers, even when questions allowed for more elaborate responses. His answers were often preceded by extended pauses, which may have indicated difficulty retrieving the appropriate language to express his thoughts. While Damien remained engaged in the interview process and demonstrated eagerness to participate, the brevity of his responses suggested challenges with expressive communication that may have constrained the depth of his contributions.

Damien also described difficulties with memory, which became evident during the interview. For example, after we discussed various purposes for reading, I repeated the question, and at that point he sighed heavily and replied, "I just can't remember." Several similar moments occurred, suggesting that his recall of information was inconsistent. Contradictions in his self-reporting also raised questions about memory function. For instance, he initially stated that he had no friends in class yet later referred to a male peer as a "friend" who sat near him. Such inconsistencies may have reflected memory lapses rather than deliberate misrepresentation.

In all, Damien presented as thoughtful, polite, and socially pleasant. His demeanor and general affability suggested that he was likely to maintain peer relationships. His learning challenges had potential implications for his developing reader identity, particularly in terms of access to meaning-making, confidence in oral expression, and the ability to construct coherent narratives of his reading experiences.

K.J.

K.J. was an 11-year-old fourth-grade white student with strawberry blonde, curly shoulder-length hair. At the time of the interview, she presented with an appearance that suggested a lack of grooming, which contributed to the impression that she was a free-spirited

child. She wore red spandex shorts, an oversized Day of the Dead t-shirt, and black high-top sneakers. Upon entering the interview room, K.J. was cheerful and immediately initiated a brief social exchange by asking how my day was going. This gesture reflected empathy and kindness and established a positive tone for the interview.

Throughout the interview, K.J. was cooperative and consistently attempted to answer each question posed. She frequently smiled and maintained steady eye contact, which conveyed her willingness to engage. Despite her evident effort, her communication patterns indicated notable challenges with receptive and expressive language. Like Damien, her responses were characterized by long pauses, hesitations, and frequent reliance on one-word answers. Rarely did she formulate complete sentences. K.J. acknowledged these difficulties directly, stating that she often "could not think of words" when attempting to respond verbally. Such self-reported struggles, combined with observed behaviors, suggested the presence of significant language delays that may have impeded her ability to participate fully in oral exchanges.

K.J.'s demeanor, however, was generally positive and lighthearted. She laughed frequently during the interaction, which contributed to a sense of rapport and ease despite her linguistic challenges. Although she remained cheerful and engaged throughout the interview, occasional environmental distractions required periodic redirection to maintain focus.

K.J. identified her immediate family, whose home language was English, as consisting of her mother, father, an older brother, a younger brother, and a sister, but she did not provide their names. When asked about additional siblings, she responded with some uncertainty, stating that she believed she had "four older adopted brothers," but concluded with the remark, "I don't know for sure though." Due to time constraints, I did not pursue further clarification. Nevertheless, the omission of names and her tentative responses may suggest either limited

clarity in her understanding of family relationships or possible difficulty articulating them in the interview context.

K.J. lived with her family in a rural area on a property that was home to many animals. During the interview, she said her family cared for nearly 20 dogs and seven puppies. She talked happily about the animals, mentioning several by name—Wigglebottom, Oreo, Fluffy, Cutie, Pandy, Sausage, Sprinkles, and Dot. She described Sausage, a bulldog, as "sweet as can be," and compared him to his sister Sprinkles, whom she said was "not as nice." The family was trying to rehome some of the puppies; however, all the animals were still living at their home at the time of the interview.

K.J. indicated that she contributed to the daily care of the dogs, including feeding, watering, and playing with them. She also reported that her family occasionally provided temporary care for neighbors' dogs. These responsibilities appeared to constitute a significant part of her daily routine. Her enthusiasm when discussing the animals suggested that her interactions with them represented a source of enjoyment, connection, and responsibility in her home environment.

In addition to her responsibilities caring for and interacting with the family dogs, K.J. engaged in structured and recreational activities with her younger brother, A.J., who was eight years old. The siblings frequently played video games and watched television together, both at home and during bus rides. One game they played on their iPhones, Gotcha, involved creating virtual worlds and characters that navigated the environment to interact with or "assassinate" other characters. K.J. reported that she enjoyed these shared activities, highlighting the social and relational significance of her time with A.J. Occasionally, A.J. read aloud to K.J., as she self-identified as struggling with oral reading, stating, "I'm a bad reader when it comes to out loud

reading." These interactions suggested that sibling and peer-supported literacy and recreational engagement constituted an important part of her home learning environment.

K.J. described reading in her home as infrequent and largely incidental. She reported that there were no books readily available and that the primary texts she encountered were those she borrowed from the school library. While her mother used a computer for employment purposes, K.J. indicated engagement with digital literacy by watching videos on YouTube.

When K.J. read aloud to her mother, she said, "When I read to Mommy, it looks like a bunch of random lines. I see words sometimes." Observations during the interview corroborated this, as K.J. frequently appeared to perceive the page as lines rather than coherent words or sentences. She did not wear corrective lenses, which may have further complicated the visual decoding of text.

K.J. reported generally positive feelings toward school, which she attributed in part to the continued presence of her father's former teacher, whose familiarity provided a sense of comfort and connection. She was enrolled in a class of 27 students and expressed that she liked her current teacher. K.J. identified several peers as friends, including a recently enrolled student whom she had actively supported in establishing social connections within the classroom, reflecting her capacity for empathy and social engagement.

Despite these social connections, K.J. expressed ambivalence toward attending school, noting that she preferred to sleep in the mornings and only enjoyed school "sometimes." Her engagement with classroom activities appeared selective; after completing required classwork, she preferred to draw rather than read. Similarly, her interaction with library books was heavily influenced by visual content. She reported that she only read books that contained illustrations,

explaining, “Pictures are interesting because it shows you a lot of different stuff and sometimes it has reading.” It seemed that K.J. did not read many books without visual support (pictures).

These patterns suggested that K.J.’s motivation to engage with print was mediated by the presence of visual cues and that her literacy behaviors were closely tied to perceived accessibility and immediate interest. This selective engagement with text may have implications for the development of her reader identity, as her emerging literacy practices appeared to favor multimodal and visually supported materials over text-dense resources, potentially shaping both her confidence and competence as a reader.

Stella

Stella was an almost 12-year-old fifth-grade student whose physical appearance conveyed greater maturity than her chronological age. She was notably tall and lanky, white, with fair skin and long, uncombed blonde hair. Stella entered the interview quietly, dressed in a tan Adidas hoodie, well-worn jeans, and pink sneakers. Among the three participants, she exhibited the highest level of social confidence and sophistication, which contributed to a dynamic and engaging interview interaction.

Stella lived in an English-speaking rural household with her mother, father, sister, and brothers. Artistic engagement constituted a prominent feature of her family’s identity, particularly among the female members. Her grandmother produced what Stella described as “old-time farm art” using traditional, culturally informed techniques and maintained a studio in her barn. Stella’s mother and sister were also skilled visual artists, primarily working in acrylic paint, indicating a sustained familial engagement with creative practices. The family’s emphasis on self-expression extended to Stella’s older brothers, both of whom had dyed their hair blue—a

practice that was previously contested by their parents and permitted only upon reaching adulthood.

She also indicated that she had close relationships with her siblings and expressed enthusiasm about attending middle school alongside her brother in the upcoming school year. These observations suggested that Stella's home environment was characterized by creative expression, familial support, and close sibling relationships, factors that may have contributed to the development of her artistic and personal identity.

Stella had her own bedroom at home. Her room had previously belonged to her brother, and she had preserved some portions of the walls with his writing on them because she thought the writing was funny. Stella reported that she read and wrote in her bedroom when she returned home from school. She loved cats and kept cats in her room because they provided her with comfort. The family had 13 cats and one dog as household pets.

Stella described her family as a "reading family," noting that their home had an extensive collection of books prominently displayed on a living room bookshelf. She mentioned that her mother participated in a book club with her sister and aunt, demonstrating that reading served as both a family activity and a social practice within their household. Stella's personal reading preferences varied depending on the context: at home, she preferred poetry and horror, while at school she chose texts such as the *Harry Potter* series to manage peer perceptions and keep her reading choices private.

In addition to print-based literacy, Stella participated in digitally mediated social communication through social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat, which she used to maintain peer relationships. Her parents monitored her computer usage, and her

father, a stay-at-home dad, “taught me a lot of new things about reading, writing, anything really, and video games.”

She identified her grandmother’s backyard treehouse as her preferred reading environment, describing it as “nature-y and flowery, kinda mythical…It’s just kind of relaxing cause it’s always quiet and the only thing you hear are the birds and, like, the leaves.” This description suggested that Stella’s engagement with reading was influenced not only by textual content but also by the physical and aesthetic qualities of the environment, which provided conditions conducive to sustained focus and immersive literacy experiences.

Stella characterized herself as “very competitive, especially in sports.” She actively participated in co-ed basketball and had been given the nickname “Wild Banshee” by her coach in recognition of her aggressive playing style. Stella participated in basketball both during school and in extracurricular contexts, and she intended to continue her involvement in the sport throughout middle and high school, indicating a sustained commitment to athletic development.

Academically, Stella experienced a significant disruption in her schooling when she was retained in second grade due to an extended absence caused by influenza. During this period, she was educated at home. She reported feeling socially and academically “awkward and weird” being in a grade with younger students and acknowledged gaps in her learning, including incomplete mastery of foundational skills. However, when classroom responsibilities were completed, she read independently on the digital platform Get Epic, appreciating the wide range of texts it offered. These experiences suggested potential challenges in aligning her academic development with age-level expectations.

Socially, Stella maintained multiple peer networks and self-identified as “kinda popular,” noting that she was familiar with many students in her school. Her peer interactions were

structured around shared interests, including video gaming, reading the *Harry Potter* series, and participating in basketball. These activities appeared to serve as both sources of social integration and contexts for skill development, contributing to her sense of competence, engagement, and identity formation within the school environment.

Stella had, at times, exhibited difficulties with emotional regulation, reporting a history of pronounced "anger issues" in both home and school contexts. She described previous incidents in which she physically manifested frustration, stating, "I used to punch holes [in the walls] when I got mad." Stella identified journaling as an effective strategy for managing these emotional responses and noted that increased self-awareness regarding her learning processes had also contributed to her capacity for self-regulation.

She further articulated that her approach to learning differed from that of her peers. Stella expressed frustration when instructional strategies failed to accommodate her individual learning needs, occasionally resulting in anger directed toward her teachers. Observations suggested that Stella's emotional responses were closely linked to her academic experiences and that her developing self-concept as a learner was shaped by both the instructional environment and her ability to access content in ways that were meaningful and effective for her.

Collectively, these observations indicated that Stella's literacy practices were shaped by an interplay of familial modeling, social context, and individual preferences. Her selective engagement with text—both in terms of genre and reading location—reflected a deliberate negotiation of social, emotional, and environmental factors, highlighting the ways in which her emerging reader identity was constructed through both personal agency and relational influences.

Themes

Several overarching themes emerged from the data. Themes are presented in this section in conjunction with the supporting evidence in the following order: The first theme is the participants' perceptions of reading. They defined reading, explained the purpose(s) reading had for them, and they talked about how reading and writing were connected. The second theme is the participants' perceptions of themselves as readers, both at school and at home. Factors that influence their reading identity is the final theme of the chapter and includes teacher influence, family influence, and the significance of choice in reading.

Perceptions of Reading

Definition of Reading

When asked the open-ended question, *What is reading?*, participants initially demonstrated uncertainty and difficulty articulating a clear definition. Their responses reflected a narrow conceptualization of reading, primarily associated with school-based activities. Early responses to the prompt were brief or hesitant, suggesting that participants had not previously considered reading outside academic contexts. As the interview progressed and examples of alternative reading contexts were introduced, participants began to expand their definitions and acknowledge that reading can occur beyond traditional classroom practices.

When asked to define reading, Damien initially responded, "I don't know." Even after additional time to think, his replies were marked by long pauses and hesitant speech. However, when the question was connected to his personal experience reading the Bible, he was able to elaborate, explaining that reading meant learning about "church, um Jesus, God, and stuff." Damien's response suggested that his understanding of reading was closely tied to familiar and personally meaningful contexts, such as reading the Bible.

K.J. similarly struggled to articulate a definition of reading. She explained that a dictionary definition might describe reading as "looking at a bunch of lines," and she noted that written words often held little meaning for her because she rarely encountered them outside school. She described reading as something that helps people "understand stuff and understand letters and stuff," indicating that she viewed reading primarily as the process of recognizing words and letters to make sense of text.

Stella also initially found it difficult to define reading, explaining that it was "kinda hard to think of a definition." After prompting, she described reading as text typically found in books or on paper and explained that readers "sound them out all in one sentence or in one paragraph." Later in the interview, Stella offered a more reflective description, noting that reading could also be enjoyable and meaningful, stating, "Reading is something many people enjoy, many people do not… it's basically putting together words and sounding them out and learning new things." Stella's response reflected a broader conceptualization of reading that included both skill development and personal engagement.

Purpose of Reading

Participants identified several motivations for engaging in reading, often emphasizing its practical and academic value. Many participants described reading as a tool for acquiring knowledge, completing school tasks, and preparing for future responsibilities. References to reading for entertainment or personal enjoyment were somewhat less common and tended to emerge after additional discussion during the interview.

Damien expressed uncertainty when discussing the purpose of reading, which may have reflected both expressive language challenges and limited awareness of its broader applications. When asked why people read, he initially responded, "Dunno… To learn about stuff." When

asked why children read, he stated, "'cause it can help us," and suggested that adults read "to help them with work," though he struggled to provide specific examples. After I introduced examples of everyday literacy practices, Damien quickly acknowledged additional forms of reading after I prompted him, naming reading product labels at Walmart and restaurant menus as examples of why he reads.

K.J. also emphasized the functional value of reading. She described literacy as a tool for managing responsibilities and accessing opportunities, explaining that reading could help someone search for employment online if they needed work while staying home with children. K.J. further described reading as necessary "to understand stuff and understand letters and stuff," and later summarized its importance in practical terms, stating simply, "Jobs. That's pretty much it." Her responses reflected an instrumental view of reading as a skill connected to future employment and everyday responsibilities.

Stella offered the most detailed explanation of reading's purpose. She emphasized reading's role in developing language skills and preparing for future responsibilities, explaining that it helped her learn words and pronunciation and may allow her to teach others in the future. Stella noted, "It helps me when I grow up, because… if I ever have kids I can teach them words and things they probably learn." She also identified reading as a source of personal enjoyment, describing her interest in poetry and the process of "figuring [poems] out."

Survey responses further supported these perspectives. Although participants offered varied explanations, a common pattern emerged in which reading was framed primarily in terms of its instrumental value. For example, K.J. described reading mainly as a pathway to employment, while Stella emphasized its practical importance in adulthood, including tasks such as obtaining a driver's license.

Reading and Writing Relationship

The data revealed that students' awareness of the relationship between reading and writing varied across participants. Damien did not identify a connection between the two, which may have reflected either a limited understanding of how reading informed writing or difficulty articulating such connections during the interview.

In contrast, K.J. demonstrated some awareness of the interrelationship between reading and writing. She explained that she read what she wrote to check her work. She also referenced elements of writing structure, including main ideas and supporting details, stating, "The main idea, the things that support the main idea, the text, and subheading type, subtype, and antonyms…" Her response suggested that she viewed reading to verify written work and understand how texts were organized.

Stella also described reading to improve her writing skills. She explained, "I usually read to 'up' my skills in reading and spelling and just becoming better at learning." Stella further noted that she liked learning how other people wrote, explaining, "I like to learn about how other people write 'cause I love how like everybody has a different type of writing and reading." Her comments suggested an awareness that reading different styles could influence her own writing.

These responses illustrated that while one participant did not clearly identify connections between reading and writing, the other two recognized reading as a foundational skill that supported writing development, vocabulary growth, and exposure to different writing styles. Participants' explanations suggested varying levels of awareness regarding how reading and writing interact as complementary literacy practices.

Perceptions of Self as a Reader

Perceptions of Self as Reader in School

Participants described their experiences with reading in school in ways that reflected both their academic self-perceptions and their emotional responses to classroom literacy activities. Their comments revealed varying levels of confidence, engagement, and comfort with reading tasks. While some participants expressed positive feelings about reading in school, others described challenges in classroom reading activities. Participants' interview responses, drawings, and survey responses suggested that reading in school was often associated with structured, individual work rather than collaborative or social experiences. These perspectives provide insight into how students understood their identities as readers within the academic environment.

For instance, in the interview I asked Damien about how he felt upon completing a book he was reading in school, and he said, "good." His brief response may have implied a sense of accomplishment, even if not explicitly stated. When asked how he felt about reading in school more broadly, he responded quickly and enthusiastically, saying "Great!" However, when probed for clarification, he was unable to explain the reasons for this positive feeling, suggesting that while Damien associated reading with positive emotions, he had limited ability to articulate their source.

Damien's drawing of what reading looks like to him in school (Figure 1) depicts him seated alone at a desk beneath an overhead light, holding a book at an awkward angle, almost above his head. The dominant use of gray and black conveys a subdued and restrictive atmosphere, with the sole accent of color—the yellow light—drawing attention to the performative nature of the activity. The black square symbolizes the teacher's desk, while the gray shaded area surrounding Damien represents a rug, suggesting boundaries within which reading is expected to occur. Collectively, these elements highlight a perception of reading as a

highly structured, teacher-regulated task rather than an intrinsically engaging or socially situated practice.

Figure 1

Damien's Drawing of What Reading Looks Like to Him in School



K.J.'s graphite pencil drawing of herself as a reader in school (Figure 2) delineates her experiences across three distinct contexts: the classroom, the school library, and the annual school book fair. K.J. does not read in the classroom because "they don't provide us books and they don't really tell us to bring books." Yet in the part of the picture where she drew herself in class, K.J. is smiling and there is a book next to her, and I wondered if this reflects her reading in a separate classroom with a different teacher. In the library depiction, the book display is adorned with hearts, yet the books themselves are rendered in straight, uniform lines without images or color, suggesting a view of books as orderly and functional rather than as sources of creativity or engagement. Despite this restrained representation, she portrays herself smiling in each setting, emphasizing her positive association with the library as a quiet and comfortable space. Her drawing of the book fair, however, illustrates a contrasting experience: rather than acquiring reading materials, she depicts herself obtaining a pen and notebook for drawing. This

decision highlighted her identification with writing and drawing as meaningful practices, while simultaneously underscoring the restricted nature of her engagement with reading.

Figure 2

K.J.'s Drawing of What Reading Looks Like to Her in School



In our interview, Stella expressed a pronounced sense of pride in her reading accomplishments, stating that she was "proud of myself, actually. I've finished a lot of my books because they're all, like, about 200 pages and it took me about a week." Her comment suggested a strong sense of achievement and satisfaction in completing longer texts. Stella identified *Open Wounds*, a poetry book, as her favorite because she related to its themes, explaining, "It's a poetry book and it's basically like this book about a girl's life… just poetry about a teenager's life. Like what a teenager experiences."

Stella reported that reading had become easier for her and that she preferred to read alone in a quiet space in the library, noting, "I just really like the quiet. I kinda get frustrated when somebody's reading really slow." She also described reading as calming, explaining that it

helped regulate her emotions: “It’s just really relaxing to me… it calms me including anger issues.”

Stella’s drawing is vibrant and colorful, with herself positioned prominently at the center of the page (Figure 3). She explained:

> This is me reading real-world history. I love history, especially about Greek gods. Books are located in between plants and bookshelves in my classroom. I like reading and can read when I am noticed for positive behavior. I get a chance to read because I’m quiet, especially when we have substitutes.

In her depiction, Stella presents reading as both a personal interest and a conditional privilege within the classroom context. Her smiling expression and the way she hugs the book tightly to her chest convey affection for the text, yet her narrative underscores that access to reading is mediated by classroom behavioral expectations. As such, reading in school might be a freely chosen practice for Stella or an activity permitted when compliance is recognized.

Figure 3

Stella’s Drawing of What Reading Looks Like to Her in School



The *Reader Self-Perception Scale* (Henk & Melnick, 1995) (Table 5) measures four items: Progress, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback, and Physiological States. Progress prompts participants to compare their present reading performance to past reading performance; Observational Comparison explains how participants perceive their reading performance in relation to that of classmates; Social Feedback refers to teachers, peers, and significant adults' comments on participants' reading; and Physiological States refers to internal emotions participants feel during reading. These four items provided insight as to how readers felt about their overall reading ability. The results of this study's survey indicate that K.J. and Damien have self-perceptions consistently below the norm in all categories, while in contrast, Stella, indicates average to high-average attitudes and self-perceptions about reading.

Table 5

Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) Outcomes

RSPS Scale Item	Damien	K.J.	Stella
Progress	33/45 - Low	34/45 - Low	40/45 - Average
Observational Comparison	18/30 - Low	12/30 - Very low.	27/30 - High

Social Feedback	32/45 - Low	28/45 - Low	37/45 - Average
Physiological States	27/40 - Low	28/40 - Low	34/40 - Average

In their answers on the Motivation to Read Profile, participants also conveyed ambivalence in their perceptions of reading in school. For instance, Damien and K.J. identified themselves as "OK readers" yet expressed concern about how others perceive their reading. Stella, while confident in her abilities, acknowledged that she sometimes finds reading "boring." Stella explained that while she sometimes struggled, she could "almost always figure it out," highlighting both the presence of difficulty and the development of resilience.

K.J. expressed a restrained emotional response like Damien when asked if she felt pride upon finishing a book. K.J. replied, "I have. I feel OK." She had difficulty explaining when reading made her happy or sad, stating after a pause, "I don't have many answers. I don't." However, she was able to identify frustration as a prominent emotion, particularly when constrained by time limits: "When we have a short amount of time to read and I want to finish the whole book, but I can't because of the time of reading… [it's hard] when I don't have my own time." Overall, K.J. summarized her experience of reading in school as "O.K.," reflecting a neutral orientation that balances occasional accomplishment with recurring frustration.

Perceptions of Self as Reader at Home

Participants' descriptions and drawings of reading at home reveal important contrasts to their in-school reading perceptions, highlighting differences in how they view reading across contexts. The data suggest that while school reading may be portrayed as isolated, constrained, or even overwhelming, reading at home is represented with more color, personalization, comfort, and freedom.

Damien had reading materials available at home, including the Bible and various sports books. He reported that his parents occasionally read newspapers and magazines. During the interview, Damien shared that he played video games but did not have a computer at home and therefore did not use social media. Although his parents seldom read aloud to him, they encouraged his reading efforts and often told him to "keep trying."

Damien's drawing (Figure 4) portrays him reading outdoors on a sunny day, surrounded by green grass, a cloudy sky, and bright patches of blue. Unlike his classroom depiction (Figure 1), which was rendered primarily in black pencil and positioned him as a small figure in the middle of the classroom, this home drawing is expansive, colorful, and fills the page. He depicts himself reading the Bible while seated alone on a bench, situating literacy within a vibrant and open environment.

While drawing, Damien emphasized the importance of including the dirt, explaining that it was necessary "because it's under the grass and grass can't grow without dirt." His comment highlights his attention to environmental detail and reveals the deliberate reasoning behind how he chose to represent his surroundings. This connection between grass and dirt reflects his understanding of how different elements within an environment are interdependent.

In a broader sense, Damien's explanation illustrates his tendency to think relationally, recognizing how parts of a system work together to create meaning—an approach that parallels the interpretive processes involved in reading and comprehension. His observation may also reflect knowledge developed through everyday experiences in a rural environment, where close interaction with land, animals, and natural processes often shapes children's understandings of how systems function. Such experiences can serve as valuable funds of knowledge that students

draw upon as they construct meaning in both their lived environments and their literacy practices.

Notably, he explained that he drew himself larger in the outdoor context because, in his words, “I’m outside and it’s bigger than the classroom.” This contrast suggests that Damien associates reading at home—or in personal spaces—with freedom, expansiveness, and vitality, while his classroom drawing implies a sense of constraint or diminished presence.

Figure 4

Damien’s Drawing of Himself Reading at Home



K.J. reported that there were no books in her home and stated that she primarily watched television and YouTube videos. She noted that she sometimes read captions on YouTube and preferred media that contained “lots of drama.” K.J. indicated that she liked to read alone because she was too old for her mother to read aloud to her. She spent much of her time in her

bedroom, where there was a television, and occasionally brought books home from school to read there as well.

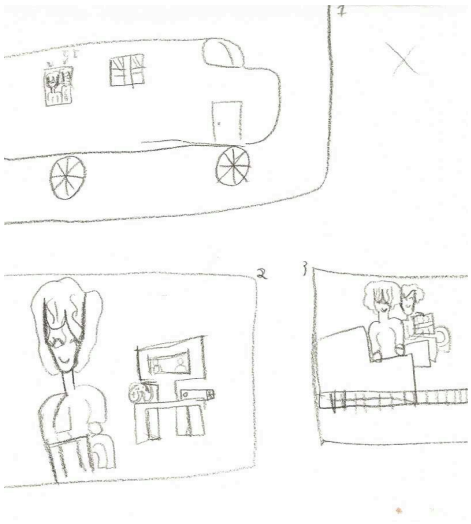
K.J.'s home-based drawing (Figure 5) stands in notable contrast to her school-based illustration. In her depiction of reading at home, she situates herself in multiple contexts that highlight both relational and personal dimensions of literacy. At the top of the drawing, she portrays her younger brother reading to her while they ride the school bus. She explains that they are the last students to exit the bus, which affords them extended time to read together. This detail suggests that K.J. values reading not only as an individual activity but also as a shared family practice occurring in transitional spaces outside of school.

In the lower left-hand corner, K.J. illustrates herself seated in her chair in her bedroom, a space she had previously described as her favorite reading spot. However, rather than reading a book, she depicts herself watching television. She explains this choice by stating, "To me, watching TV, that's how I read. Some things on TV you can read." This statement demonstrates K.J.'s expanded definition of reading, one that includes multimedia and multimodal literacy practices and acknowledges that meaning making can occur through visual and textual cues in non-traditional forms.

The bottom right-hand drawing once again portrays K.J. on the bus with her brother, reinforcing the role of sibling relationships in shaping her engagement with reading. In contrast, her school-based drawing depicted her alone, overwhelmed by the presence of many books in the library setting. This juxtaposition reveals a significant difference in how she perceives reading across contexts. While school is represented as a space of isolation and pressure, her home and family environments are represented as calm, relational, and personally meaningful.

Figure 5

K.J. Drawing of Herself Reading at Home



During our interview, Stella reported that there were many books in her home and noted that her mother, aunt, and sister participated in a book club together. She explained that her mother praised her reading and purchased books for her, which reinforced Stella's positive feelings toward reading. Stella had her own bedroom, where she often read poetry and history books with her cat nearby. She also enjoyed visiting her grandparents' home, where she frequently read outdoors in a treehouse.

Stella's home drawing (Figure 6) further illustrates her enthusiasm for reading and highlights the ways in which her home environment supports her literacy identity. As she narrated her drawing, Stella explained, "My hair is up in a clip because I can see to read. I'm at a desk at home. I have too many books." She portrays herself seated at a desk in her bedroom, smiling as she holds a book, with her pet cats surrounding her. The presence of her pets reinforces the sense of comfort and familiarity she associates with reading in the home, positioning the activity as both enjoyable and nurturing.

The desk is depicted as a space filled with a range of reading and writing materials, including books, drawings, miscellaneous papers, and a can of soda. This imagery suggests that Stella does not limit herself to a single text but instead engages with multiple forms of literacy simultaneously. Her representation underscores the interconnectedness of reading and writing, as she situates herself within a creative environment where texts, images, and personal expression coexist.

Stella also emphasized that she was reading "old doll books" in this picture, a choice that aligns with her interest in doll-related magazines she reads at her grandparents' house. This consistency in her reading choices across different environments suggests that her identity as a reader is shaped not only by access to texts but also by strong topic preferences that carry personal meaning.

Stella's home drawing reflects a positive, abundant, and self-directed reading identity. Unlike the somewhat structured or conditional opportunities she described in her school setting, her home environment provides her with autonomy, comfort, and a wealth of resources, all of which reinforce the joy she associates with reading.

Figure 6

Stella's Drawing of Herself Reading at Home



Survey responses reveal participants' perceptions of reading, including experiences situated at home. These insights are summarized below.

In the RSPS (Table 6), participants unanimously agreed that family members perceive them as good readers. All participants also indicated that their families believe they read well. However, each participant reported uncertainty about whether family members enjoy listening to them read. This pattern suggests that while participants perceive family support for their reading abilities, opportunities for shared oral reading experiences at home may be less prominent. As a result, family perceptions may contribute positively to participants' developing reader identities, even though direct reading interactions with family members may be limited. From the perspective of theories of situated expectancy-value theory and self-determination theory, these perceptions of competence may support participants' developing reader identities as well.

Table 6

Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) Response Excerpts Related to Family and Reading

Statement	Damien	K.J.	Stella
People in my family think I am a good reader.	Agree	Agree	Strongly agree
People in my family think I read pretty well.	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree
People in my family like to listen to me read.	Undecided	Undecided	Undecided

In relation to their own perceptions of reading, all three participants agreed that reading is relaxing and that they feel comfortable while reading (Table 7). However, Damien and K.J. expressed uncertainty about whether reading makes them feel happy, whereas Stella strongly affirmed that it does. Responses suggest that while participants generally experience reading as comfortable and manageable, their emotional connection to reading varies. From the perspective

of motivation frameworks such as situated expectancy-value theory and self-determination theory, participants' agreement that reading feels comfortable may reflect a developing sense of competence as readers. At the same time, the variation in emotional enjoyment indicates that relational and affective dimensions of reading may play differing roles in shaping each participant's developing reader identity.

Table 7

Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) Response Excerpts Related to Self and Reading

Statement	Damien	K.J.	Stella
Reading makes me feel happy inside.	Undecided	Undecided	Strongly agree
Reading is easier for me than it used to be.	Agree	Agree	Agree
I feel comfortable when I read.	Agree	Agree	Strongly agree
I think reading is relaxing.	Agree	Agree	Strongly agree

In the MRP (Table 8), several commonalities emerged across participants' responses. All participants indicated that they understand most of what they read, view people who read as interesting, and perceive themselves as competent readers, ranging from "okay" to "very good." They further agreed that spending time reading is enjoyable, that they devote at least some portion of their time to reading, and that receiving a book as a gift brings them happiness, though to varying degrees.

Table 8

Motivation to Read Profile (MRP) Response Excerpts

Statement	Damien	K.J.	Stella
When I am reading by myself, I understand	almost everything I read	almost everything I read	everything I read
People who read a lot are	interesting	interesting	very interesting
I am	an OK reader	an OK reader	a very good reader
I think spending time reading is	great	great	really great
Reading is	kind of easy for me	kind of easy for me	very easy for me
When I have free time, I spend	some of my time reading	a lot of my time reading	some of my time reading
When someone gives me a book for a present	I am very happy	I am sort of happy	I am very happy

Factors that Influence Reading Identity

Teacher Influence on Reading Identity

Participants' descriptions of classroom experiences revealed that teacher support and instructional practices played an important role in shaping how they perceived themselves as readers. Interview responses, survey data, and participant drawings highlighted variation in the types and quality of instructional interactions students experienced in literacy instruction. While Stella described supportive teacher guidance and constructive feedback that strengthened her confidence in reading, Damien and K.J. reported more limited engagement or mixed experiences with classroom reading practices.

Teachers play a central role in supporting students' reading development through instruction, feedback, and classroom interactions. However, the findings revealed variation in the types and depth of teacher interactions experienced by participants, which appeared to influence how students perceived reading and how they understood themselves as readers.

Damien's interview responses suggested a limited perception of teacher involvement in his reading development. Although he reported feeling "great" about reading in school, he struggled to explain why. His responses may suggest that teacher support was not a central component of how he understood his reading experiences.

In her interview, K.J. described moments of teacher involvement, particularly through instructional support that emphasized comprehension strategies such as identifying main ideas and supporting details. However, she also expressed frustration with time limits placed on reading tasks, stating that classroom expectations sometimes constrained her ability to fully engage with texts. These experiences illustrate the dual role of teachers: while instructional guidance can scaffold comprehension, classroom structures may also contribute to student frustration.

In contrast, Stella described a more positive perception of teacher influence in her interview. She emphasized the importance of instructional support in improving her reading skills, explaining that her teacher helped pronounce difficult words and guided her through texts without directly providing the answers. As Stella stated, "She will, like, pronounce the words and help you get through, but not fully give you the answer… She'll teach you." Her description suggested that guided instruction helped her develop greater independence and confidence as a reader. Stella also described opportunities to read as a reward for positive behavior and highlighted her growth in spelling and pronunciation through teacher feedback. These interactions suggested that teacher guidance contributed to her sense of progress and competence in literacy tasks.

Responses to the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) (Table 9) further illustrated variation in students' perceptions of teacher support. Damien agreed that his teacher believed he

was a capable reader, while K.J. expressed uncertainty and Stella strongly agreed. Participants also expressed different reactions to teachers reading aloud in class. Damien and K.J. described enjoying when teachers read aloud, while Stella reported finding it less engaging, suggesting a preference for independent reading. These differences suggested varying levels of affirmation from teachers, which may contribute to differences in students' confidence as readers.

Table 9

Teacher Influence on Reading (RSPS Response Excerpts)

Statement	Damien	K.J.	Stella
I can tell that my teacher likes to listen to me read.	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
My teacher thinks that my reading is fine.	Agree	Undecided	Strongly agree
My teacher thinks I am a good reader.	Agree	Undecided	Strongly agree

Participants' drawings also provided insight into their perceptions of classroom reading. Notably, none of the drawings included teachers or peers. Instead, each participant depicted themselves reading alone at a desk or table. For example, K.J.'s drawing showed herself surrounded by numerous books, emphasizing both the solitary nature of reading and the volume of texts encountered in school. These visual representations suggested that participants often conceptualized school-based reading as an individual activity rather than one shaped through social or instructional interaction.

Despite differences in perceived teacher support, all three participants indicated that they believed their reading abilities were improving. Damien expressed this most emphatically, stating, "I super agree with that!" This shared sense of progress suggests that participants

perceived growth in their reading abilities even though their experiences with teacher feedback and affirmation differed.

Peer Influence on Reading Identity

Peer interactions also emerged as an important factor shaping students' perceptions of reading and their developing reader identities. Classroom relationships influenced how students engaged with literacy tasks, how comfortable they felt participating in reading activities, and how they evaluated their own reading abilities in relation to others.

Although Damien reported having fewer identifiable friendships in class, his seating arrangement near the teacher and another student appeared to provide a supportive environment that helped him feel calm and comfortable during classroom activities. While Damien did not explicitly describe peer influence on his reading development, the classroom social environment still appeared to shape his comfort and participation in literacy activities.

Similarly, K.J. described friendships and collaborative interactions within the classroom that influenced her school experiences more broadly. Although her comments focused less directly on reading, peer relationships appeared to contribute to the overall classroom climate in which literacy learning occurred.

Stella described multiple peer networks and indicated that reading sometimes functioned as a social activity within her friendships. She mentioned that her reading choices at school were occasionally shaped by peer perceptions, noting that she selected certain texts—such as the *Harry Potter* series—in part to manage how classmates perceived her reading interests. These comments suggest that peer expectations and social dynamics influenced how Stella navigated reading within the classroom environment.

Participants also differed in their perceptions of peer responses to their reading. Based on their survey results (Table 10). Stella expressed strong confidence that classmates viewed her as a capable reader, and Damien agreed that peers likely viewed him positively as well. However, K.J. was uncertain whether classmates perceived her as a good reader and reported that peers did not enjoy listening to her read aloud. These differences highlight how peer perceptions may intersect with students' developing reading identities.

Table 10

Peer Influence on Reading (RSPS Response Excerpts)

Statement	Damien	K.J.	Stella
My classmates like to listen to me read.	Undecided	Disagree	Undecided
My classmates think that I read pretty well.	Strongly agree	Undecided	Strongly agree

Overall, these findings suggest that peer relationships contribute to the social context in which reading identity develops. While Stella appeared confident in how peers perceived her reading abilities, Damien and K.J. expressed uncertainty about peer reactions, particularly during oral reading situations. These variations illustrate how peer social dynamics may influence students' confidence, participation, and comfort with literacy activities.

Family Influence

Family support emerged as an important factor shaping participants' reading experiences, though the nature and degree of that support varied considerably across families. Participants described different forms of encouragement, ranging from verbal reinforcement to the provision of books and shared reading experiences.

Damien described his family as encouraging him to persist in reading, recalling that they often told him to "just keep trying." Although this verbal encouragement suggested a supportive

environment, Damien indicated that reading was not frequently practiced as a shared family activity. When asked whether his family read with him or discussed their own reading, he responded that it occurred “not a lot,” and that they did not typically talk about what they read. These responses suggested that Damien experienced encouragement primarily through verbal support rather than through modeled reading behaviors or shared literacy experiences. He also reported preferring to read alone in his bedroom, reinforcing the individual nature of his reading experiences.

K.J., in contrast, described her home as “not the reading family,” suggesting that reading was not a central activity in her household. She explained that her family did not discuss reading at home, stating simply, “No.” The absence of literacy-related conversation indicated limited opportunities for shared engagement with reading. At the same time, K.J. described having a personal space where she sometimes read, noting that she preferred reading in “my chair, which is near my TV.” This description suggests that reading mostly occurred independently, sometimes alongside other forms of entertainment, or as a multimodal literacy practice.

Stella’s experiences differed significantly from those of Damien and K.J. She described her family as actively engaged in conversations about books and reading, explaining, “They talk so much about what they read.” Stella also reported that her family purchased books for her, noting that “they buy me new books to keep going and keep reading.” In addition to providing access to reading materials, Stella described participating in family-based reading activities, including a reading circle. These experiences suggested that reading was both valued and socially supported within her home environment.

These accounts illustrate the varied ways family environments influenced participants’ experiences with reading. While Damien and K.J. described encouragement that occurred

primarily through individual effort and limited family involvement, Stella described a home environment in which reading was more actively supported through conversation, shared activities, and access to books.

Choice of What, Where and When to Read

Diverse Reading Materials. The data revealed that participants incorporated both print and digital resources into their reading practices. These resources expanded access to texts and provided flexible opportunities for engagement in both recreational and informational contexts.

Damien did not emphasize online reading as strongly as the other participants but reported that he occasionally engaged with digital text while playing video games. He explained that reading captions and directions during gameplay helped him participate more effectively. This suggests that Damien encountered reading within activities connected to his recreational interests. In addition, Damien reported that he located reading materials through the school library, explaining that he typically found books by "looking for it." He also identified sports books as a preferred type of text, indicating a tendency to select materials related to his personal interests.

K.J. also reported reading online. When asked about digital reading, she explained that reading online was easier when she had time to do it independently. She described reading captions and informational text associated with YouTube videos, suggesting that she encountered reading within multimedia environments.

K.J. demonstrated limited familiarity with specific book titles or characters during the discussion of reading preferences, responding "No" when asked whether she had a favorite book. Instead, she described texts using broad categories such as "little kiddie books" and "big kid books." K.J. expressed a preference for books that contained dramatic elements and noted that

she did not keep books in her room. This description contrasts somewhat with other aspects of her literacy experiences. She explained that she enjoys books with illustrations, that her brother occasionally reads to her, and that she sometimes reads to him on the bus ride home from school. The siblings also spend time playing video games together, suggesting that her literacy experiences may extend beyond traditional print-based reading. Taken together, K.J.'s responses suggest that her reading identity may be shaped less by specific textual engagement and more by shared, social, and multimodal literacy experiences within her everyday home environment.

Stella described the most extensive use of digital and print resources compared with the other two participants. She reported frequent use of the digital reading platform Get Epic, explaining, "I get on Get Epic and it's like a reading book site for online books." Stella also described reading within online social spaces such as Instagram, noting that her account was child-protected. In addition to digital reading, Stella reported access to a wide range of print materials at home, including cookbooks, recipes, magazines, and poetry books. She identified *Open Wounds* as her favorite book and explained that she particularly enjoyed reading poetry. Together, these accounts illustrate that participants encountered reading through a variety of formats and platforms. While Damien and K.J. described reading connected to specific activities such as gaming or online media, Stella reported access to a wider range of print and digital materials. These differences suggest variation in both access to resources and familiarity with specific texts.

Where and When to Read. The findings also revealed that participants often preferred to read in quiet, independent environments. Reading was frequently described as an individual activity that occurred in spaces that allowed concentration and comfort.

Both Damien and K.J. expressed a clear preference for solitary reading. Damien stated simply that he preferred to "read alone," suggesting that he experienced reading as a self-directed activity. Similarly, K.J. explained that she would "rather read alone," indicating that she preferred reading without distraction from others.

K.J. also emphasized the importance of pacing in her reading. She explained that she sometimes paused while reading, stating, "I actually barely have had any problems reading. It's just sometimes I have to stop, put the book down, look around, and take two minutes." This response suggested that she used breaks to manage attention and comprehension while reading. She also noted that she occasionally read online, which provided additional opportunities for independent reading.

Stella similarly described reading as an activity she preferred to do in quiet environments. She explained, "I usually just read in the actual books," indicating a preference for print texts. Stella described reading at her grandmother's house as particularly enjoyable because the environment was "always quiet." Her description suggested that calm and comfortable environments supported her reading experiences.

Overall, participants described reading as an activity they often engaged in independently and in quiet spaces. Their responses indicated that environmental conditions, personal preferences, and access to both print and digital resources influenced where and how they chose to read.

Chapter Summary

The findings of this study illustrate that reading identity for students with learning disabilities is complex, contextual, and shaped by a range of experiences across school, home, and digital environments. Participants described reading in ways that reflected both their

personal experiences with texts and the settings in which reading occurred. While school contexts were sometimes associated with pressure, difficulty, or limited engagement, home and informal environments often provided greater opportunities for choice, comfort, and personal relevance.

Several important understandings emerged across participants' responses. First, teacher, peer, and family support influenced how students perceived themselves as readers. Encouragement, access to books, and opportunities for shared literacy experiences varied considerably across families. Second, contrasts between school and home contexts highlighted how environment shaped participants' reading experiences, with home frequently associated with relaxation and autonomy and school more often connected to structured expectations. Third, access to reading materials—including both print and digital texts—played an important role in shaping students' engagement with reading. Finally, participants consistently described a preference for independent reading, often emphasizing quiet spaces and self-paced engagement.

Together, these findings provide insight into how students with learning disabilities describe and experience reading within multiple contexts. The next chapter interprets these findings within the broader literature on reading identity, literacy practices, and learning disabilities, and discusses implications for instructional practice, family engagement, and future research.

CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand how fourth- and fifth-grade students with a learning disability perceive their reading identities and to examine the factors that influence those identities. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do rural upper-elementary students with a learning disability view their reading identity?

RQ2: What key factors influence their reading identity?

Findings from the data include several interconnected influences that shaped how Damien, K.J., and Stella perceived themselves as readers. These themes included the situated nature of reading identity, the importance of connections between school and home literacy experiences, the role of autonomy in reading practices, the affective dimension of reading, and the affordances and challenges associated with living in rural environments. Together, these findings highlight the complex and context-dependent nature of reading identity for rural upper elementary students with learning disabilities.

I interpret these findings in relation to existing scholarship and research on reading identity, reading motivation, rural context, and students with learning disabilities to discuss how the key findings align with, extend, or challenge current understandings in the field. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications for literacy instructional and educational practice, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future inquiry.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings provide answers to both questions. For question one, how rural upper elementary students with LD perceive reading and themselves as readers heavily depends on the interplay of contextual, motivational, emotional, and relational considerations across home and

school environments. For the participants, reading was an activity closely connected to their personal experiences, environments, and relationships with others.

For question two, the findings revealed that several factors influenced their reading identity. Their perceptions of themselves as readers were influenced by teacher instructional practices, peer interactions, family attitudes toward reading, opportunities for autonomy, access to literacy materials, affective responses to reading experiences, and rural contexts.

The Situated Nature of Reading Identity

One of the key findings of this study is the situated nature of reading identity, suggesting that students' perceptions of themselves as readers are influenced by the contexts in which reading occurs and the social interactions embedded within those experiences. In school settings, reading is often framed as a structured and evaluative task associated with grades, fluency checks, and comprehension assessments. In contrast, reading at home is more frequently mediated by comfort, autonomy, and personal interest. These differences underscore that reading identity is not fixed but socially constructed and context-dependent within students' developing self-concepts (Alvermann, 2001; Hall, 2012; Moje & Luke, 2009).

Across participants, engagement with reading reflected variations in expectancy for success, task value, and perceived cost (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 2000). In school contexts, reading was closely tied to evaluation and performance. This pattern is further illustrated in two of the in-school drawings by Damien and K.J. that convey isolation and limited engagement with text. Together, these representations reflect a perceived higher cost and lower expectancy for success, contributing to a more negative reading identity in school settings.

In contrast, home environments offered greater flexibility, allowing participants to select texts, regulate their pace, and engage with personally meaningful topics. These conditions

supported feelings of autonomy and competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000), increased the perceived value of reading, and reduced its emotional cost. As a result, students demonstrated a more positive reading identity in home contexts.

These findings further suggest that reading identities develop through social interactions and the roles students assume within particular environments (Hall, 2007, 2012, 2016; Wagner et al., 2024). Across settings, participants' perceptions of themselves as readers emerged through repeated experiences, with school and home contexts fostering distinct forms of engagement that contributed differently to the development of their reading identities.

School and Home Literacy Connections

The school environment emerged as another key influence shaping students' reading identities, offering both opportunities for engagement and sources of constraint. Participants described classroom reading as structured and evaluative, often tied to performance and assessment. For students with learning disabilities, these conditions may intensify feelings of pressure and self-consciousness about reading.

Teachers also played a critical role in students' reading experiences. When teachers recognized effort, provided scaffolded support, and validated students' interests, supporting students' sense of competence and relatedness, all three participants reported greater motivation and a stronger sense of belonging as readers (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Conversely, classroom environments characterized by rigid pacing or limited differentiation appeared to hinder engagement and self-confidence. Consistent with prior research, inclusive and strength-based practices—such as offering varied texts, integrating multimodal literacy tools, and celebrating incremental progress—can significantly influence how students with learning differences construct positive reading identities (Alvermann, 2002; Hall, 2012).

Modeling and support within the home also emerged as vital influences on how students with LD viewed themselves as readers. Participants' narratives suggested that when family members valued reading through encouragement, discussion, or visible engagement with literacy, participants were more likely to view reading as meaningful and attainable.

Family involvement in literacy experiences has long been associated with increased reading motivation and self-efficacy (Baker, Scher, & Mackler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). For students with LD, these influences may help counterbalance academic frustrations experienced in school (Burden, 2008; Klassen, 2010). Therefore, strengthening home–school connections becomes essential.

When educators and families communicate about students' reading goals, strategies, and progress, they create consistent literacy expectations across contexts and reinforce students' developing reading identities. Such collaboration supports the psychological needs for relatedness, competence (Ryan & Deci, 2000), positioning reading as a shared and meaningful practice rather than solely an academic task.

Autonomy and Control in Reading Practices

Another key finding in the study is the participant's desire to exercise autonomy and control over how, when, and where they engaged in reading. Across interviews and drawings, the participants described reading as an activity best undertaken on their own terms, often in quiet spaces or during moments of self-selected engagement. These behaviors reflect students' efforts to negotiate and maintain positive reader identities within contexts that may not always affirm their competence. By determining their own reading environments and practices, the participants constructed identities that allowed them to view themselves as capable readers despite the challenges they encountered in formal academic settings. This finding aligns with research

suggesting that autonomy is a central motivational construct in reading engagement, particularly for students with learning disabilities who may experience diminished control over academic experiences (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Guthrie, 2004).

The connection between agency and reading identity observed in this study is consistent with findings from prior research that suggest opportunities for choice can strengthen reading identity. When students can select texts, topics, and reading environments, their sense of ownership over literacy activities often increases (Gambrell, 2011; Schiefele, 2009). Student choice and agency support more positive reading identities among older students (Alvermann, 2001; Becnel & Moeller, 2015; and Frankel & Fields, 2019). The benefits of autonomy were also evident among the upper-elementary LD participants in this study. For the participants, autonomy functioned both as a coping strategy and as a source of empowerment, enabling them to engage with reading in ways that affirmed their interests and identities.

Reading as an Emotional Act

An additional important finding related to participants' reading identities is the affective dimension of reading. For Damien, K.J., and Stella, reading was not solely a cognitive or academic task, but an emotional experience marked by frustration, pride, anxiety, and accomplishment. These emotional responses influenced how they interpreted their reading experiences and how they perceived themselves as readers (Hall, 2012; McKenna et al., 2012). For students with learning disabilities, affective responses to reading tasks may become intertwined with developing self-concepts as readers, reinforcing or challenging beliefs about competence and belonging within literacy environments (Booth, 2006).

When reading is associated with anxiety or repeated difficulty, students may perceive the cost of engagement as high and their likelihood of success as low. On the other hand,

experiences of mastery and enjoyment may increase the perceived value of reading and strengthen motivation (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Participants' interviews, survey responses, and drawings reflected the pattern that successful reading experiences were often associated with feelings of calm, control, and satisfaction, whereas reading challenges may sometimes trigger self-doubt or even avoidance. This study indicates that affective experiences are not peripheral to reading development but central to how students with LD engage with text and construct their identities as readers.

Affordances and Challenges of Rurality

Finally, living in a remote, rural environment was found to influence students' reading identities. The rural setting shaped how students understood reading as both practical and personal. Because access to reading materials and literacy experiences was often limited by geographic isolation, participants described reading in ways that were closely tied to their daily lives, personal interests, and available resources. For example, K.J. described reading on the school bus and Stella described reading in a treehouse, illustrating how reading often occurred in independent and self-directed contexts. Participants frequently associated reading at home with functional purposes, such as learning about animals, reading religious texts, or exploring topics of personal interest through digital devices. These findings align with research suggesting that rural students often construct literacy practices around local values, family routines, and self-reliant identities (Donehower et al., 2007).

From the perspective of situated expectancy-value theory, these findings suggest that students' motivation to read was influenced by both their expectations for success and the value they placed on reading within their rural contexts (Eccles & Wigfield, 2020). When students had access to reading materials that aligned with their interests and felt successful in their reading,

they were more likely to view reading as valuable and relevant. Similarly, self-determination theory helps explain the importance of autonomy in these rural contexts (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Participants often described reading in self-selected and independent settings, suggesting that autonomy supported more positive reading experiences and contributed to more positive reading identities.

In this context, the school library and classroom reading opportunities became especially important. In communities where access to bookstores or public libraries is limited and home book collections may be small, literacy engagement often depends on the school's capacity to provide materials and opportunities. Access to books and opportunities to select texts aligned with personal interests may increase the perceived value of reading and support students' beliefs in their reading ability, further contributing to the development of positive reading identities.

Students construct their reading identities through repeated interactions with the environments in which literacy occurs (Lewis & Del Valle, 2009). The participants' rural contexts influenced not only what and how they read, but also how they understood reading as a meaningful and attainable activity. These findings suggest that reading identity for rural upper-elementary students with learning disabilities develops through the interaction of context, motivation, autonomy, and access to literacy opportunities. Supporting students in rural communities therefore requires not only addressing reading skills, but also expanding access to texts, fostering motivation, supporting autonomy, and valuing the place-based experiences that shape how students understand themselves as readers.

By recognizing these interconnected influences, educators can better support rural students with learning disabilities in developing resilient, positive, and enduring reading identities. By addressing the limited research on reading identity among rural students with

learning disabilities, this study extends existing scholarship and offers new insight into how contextual environments, motivational beliefs, and emotional experiences interact to shape students' identities as readers.

Implications for Practice

The implications of students' voices in this study are both practical and theoretical. The findings suggest that reading identity is not a fixed or singular construct but rather a situated phenomenon shaped by where, how, and with whom reading occurs. For students diagnosed with learning disabilities, reading identity develops through experiences in classrooms, homes, and communities that either affirm or constrain their sense of agency as readers.

One important implication concerns the value of strong home–school connections. When educators and families collaborate to support literacy development, students are more likely to experience consistency and affirmation across learning environments. Regular communication among teachers, reading specialists, and caregivers can promote shared understanding of students' reading strengths, challenges, and interests. Such collaboration can help create continuity between school-based instruction and home literacy practices, thereby strengthening students' confidence and comfort with reading across contexts.

Another implication centers on the importance of student choice and multimodality in literacy instruction. Participants in this study demonstrated greater motivation and engagement when they had opportunities to select reading materials or interact with texts through multiple modes, including digital, visual, and auditory formats. Providing flexible reading pathways respects diverse learning profiles and aligns with research emphasizing autonomy as a driver of motivation and self-efficacy (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Guthrie, 2004). Literacy instruction that

incorporates relevance, accessibility, and self-selection may support sustained engagement among students with LD.

The findings also highlight the affective dimension of reading. For these students, reading was not solely a cognitive task but also an emotional experience capable of eliciting frustration, pride, or enjoyment depending on the context. Teachers must therefore approach literacy instruction with sensitivity to the emotional experiences that accompany reading development. Practices such as recognizing incremental progress, acknowledging effort, and providing supportive feedback can help transform reading from a source of anxiety into an opportunity for resilience and accomplishment.

Finally, this research underscores the influence of rural contexts on reading identity formation. Geographic isolation and limited access to print resources may constrain the breadth of students' reading experiences and opportunities for literacy interaction. Educators working in rural settings may therefore benefit from advocating for expanded access to diverse texts through digital platforms, community partnerships, and mobile library programs. Instruction that values rural students' experiences, interests, and place-based literacies can further support meaningful engagement with reading.

Collectively, these implications underscore the importance of viewing reading as a relational, contextual, and emotionally grounded practice rather than solely as a set of cognitive skills. The experiences of Damien, K.J., and Stella demonstrate that reading identity develops through the interaction of instructional practices, motivational supports, emotional experiences, and environmental conditions. Literacy instruction that acknowledges these interconnected influences may better support students with learning disabilities in developing confidence, engagement, and a sustained sense of agency as readers. For educators working in rural contexts,

attending to students' life experiences, providing meaningful opportunities for choice, and fostering supportive relationships across home and school environments may play a particularly important role in strengthening students' reading identities.

Limitations and Future Research

As with any qualitative study, this research is shaped by contextual and methodological boundaries. The findings are based on three focal participants from a single rural elementary school, each diagnosed with a learning disability. I did not have access to additional educational records or detailed diagnostic information about the participants and relied on school personnel to identify students with learning disabilities. Although this reliance limited the availability of detailed information about participants' learning profiles, the in-depth qualitative approach provided rich insights into the students' reading experiences. While the small sample size limits the transferability of the findings, the purpose of this study was to explore how upper-elementary students with learning disabilities in rural contexts construct their reading identities within specific cultural, geographic, and educational environments.

A second limitation concerns the nature of the data collection. The study relied on self-reported data through interviews, drawings, and surveys, which may have been influenced by students' comfort levels, expressive language abilities, and interpretations of the questions. Although triangulation of multiple data sources enhanced the trustworthiness of the findings, participants' responses may reflect what they were able to articulate rather than the full complexity of their literacy experiences. Additionally, because participants were identified as having learning disabilities without disclosure of their specific diagnoses, differences among various learning profiles could not be examined in detail. For example, although Stella was

identified as a student with LD, her reading behaviors and level of competence differed notably from those of the other two participants.

Another limitation of this study relates to the participant population and the rural context in which the research was conducted. The study took place in a small, close-knit community where social relationships are deeply established and residents are highly familiar with one another. By only reaching out to the families of children with LD, there was a risk of these families feeling singled out in their community. To address this concern, future research could extend this work by examining reading identity development among larger and more diverse groups of students, students with learning disabilities and without learning disabilities, across grade levels and geographic regions. Comparative studies across rural, suburban, and urban settings may illuminate how community context and access to literacy resources shape reading identity in distinct ways.

Longitudinal case studies may also provide valuable insight into how reading identities evolve over time. Following students across multiple years as they transition through lower elementary and upper elementary could deepen understanding of how instructional environments, peer relationships, family support, and access to literacy resources influence students' motivation, self-perceptions, and engagement with reading.

Further research could also examine the roles of teachers and families in shaping reading identity of upper elementary students with LD in rural schools, including how educators' beliefs, instructional practices, and feedback influence students' affective experiences with reading. In addition, exploring digital and multimodal reading opportunities—particularly in resource-limited rural contexts—may reveal how technology can support motivation and engagement in literacy practices.

Continued inquiry into the intersections of reading identity, motivation, affect, and context will contribute to more inclusive and responsive literacy instruction. Understanding how students with learning disabilities perceive themselves as readers—and the factors that support or constrain these perceptions—remains essential for developing equitable literacy practices across diverse educational settings.

Conclusions

This study sought to better understand how rural upper-elementary students with learning disabilities perceive and construct their identities as readers. The voices of Damien, K.J., and Stella reveal that reading identity is shaped not only by cognitive ability but also by the contexts, relationships, and emotional experiences that surround literacy learning. Their experiences demonstrate that reading identity develops through the interaction of motivation, affect, autonomy, and access to meaningful literacy opportunities across home, school, and community environments. In rural settings, where geographic isolation and limited access to literacy resources may shape students' experiences with reading, acknowledging students' life contexts and supporting their agency as readers becomes particularly important. By centering students' perspectives, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how reading identity develops for learners with disabilities and highlights the importance of literacy environments that affirm students' competence, interests, and sense of belonging as readers.

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APPENDIX A: DATA COLLECTION

How Data Will Contribute to the Understanding of Research Questions

Instrument used	Research Question 1	Research Question 2
	RQ1: How do rural upper elementary students with a learning disability view their reading identity?	RQ2: What key factors influence their reading identity?
Motivation to Read Profile (MRP)	The items are designed to determine students' perceived value of reading and self-concept as readers. They may be used with students with SLD.	Items are designed to determine the value students place on reading, which would reveal the factors they believe contribute to their reading identity.
The Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS)	This survey measures intermediate reader self-efficacy, attitudes, and self-perceptions and may be used with students with SLD.	There are four domains: progress, observational comparison, social feedback, and physiological states. Students rank items from strongly agree to strongly disagree, which will tell what factors they find impact their reading identity.
Semi-structured Interviews	Students will have the opportunity to elaborate on their feelings about reading identity in a semi-structured framework.	Students will be explicitly asked what they feel affects their reading identity.
Drawings	Students will be able to draw a picture of themselves as a reader and orally explain the image to the researcher. What they include in their drawing, the setting, items in the	Students' drawings of themselves as readers may include information about

	drawing, and other people will reveal how they feel about themselves as readers. They will be asked, “How do you feel about reading? Draw a picture of yourself as a reader. Include a place, others with you if appropriate, and any items you’d have while reading.”	factors impacting their reading identity.

APPENDIX B: DATA COLLECTION

Research Protocol for Drawings

Who Am I As a Reader? Voices of Underrepresented Rural Students with Specific Learning Disability

Participant Pseudonym: _____

SCRIPT: Welcome, and thank you for meeting with me today to participate in this research project. I am Marti Limbocker, a doctoral student at the University of Oklahoma, Jeannine Rainbolt School of Education, conducting my dissertation research. You have been invited to participate in this project because you are an upper elementary student. Through this study, I hope to better understand how you view reading and yourself as a reader. We call that reader identity. I also want to learn what influences you to read or not to read. I anticipate that today's drawing activity and the follow-up conversation will take about 30 minutes, but we can talk about the drawings for longer if necessary. You can ask to stop the activity and conversation at any time. Your participation is entirely voluntary. Your honest answers will help me to understand your feelings and thoughts about reading. I want to know how you feel about reading inside and outside school. Your drawing and everything you say to me will be completely anonymous and confidential, and you may withdraw your participation or stop participating at any time without consequence. I would like your permission to audio record this activity and our conversation because I do not want to miss any of your responses, but if you wish to discontinue the recording or the interview itself, just let me know. <Pause here for feedback.> How does this feel? Are you comfortable with the format? Do you have any questions? Let us begin the interview and drawing. Please let me know if you need to stop or take a break.
Defining Reader Identity: Draw a Picture of Yourself as a Reader
SCRIPT: As you know, a part of my study is to understand how you view yourself as a reader, so I want to ask you to draw a picture of yourself as a reader. Include yourself in the picture, the

setting, and all objects related to your reading experiences. Please draw two pictures: one of yourself reading in school and one of yourself reading outside of school. You may draw two separate pictures or two on the same page. It is up to you! Take your time. Try to fill in the entire page and use colors. You may add words to the pictures, or not.

Tell me about your picture.
What do you mean by (X)?
Tell me more about this part of your drawing.
Why did you include (X) or not include (X)?
Why did you choose these colors?
Why did you make this (X) bigger and this (X) smaller?
Anything else you want to say about your drawing?

Who are the people/objects in your drawing?
What are you reading in the drawing?
Tell me the story of your drawing.

APPENDIX C: DATA COLLECTION

Motivation to Read Profile - Revised

Update of public-domain instrument developed by National Reading Research Center, updated by Malloy, Marinak, Gambrell, & Mazzoni (2013)

Teacher Directions for the MRP Reading Survey

Distribute copies of the Reading Survey.
Ask students to complete the survey honestly. Assure them there are no right or wrong answers.
The survey is designed to have the teacher read the questions and answer choices to the students.

A. I am in a. 2nd grade b. 3rd grade c. 4th grade c. 5th grade d. 6th grade	B. I am a a. Boy b. Girl
1. My friends think I am a. a very good reader b. a good reader c. an OK reader d. a poor reader	2. Reading a book is something I like to do a. never b. almost never c. sometimes d. often
3. I read a. not as well as my friends b. about the same as my friends c. a little better than my friends d. a lot better than my friends	4. My friends think reading is a. really fun b. fun c. OK to do d. no fun at all

5. When I come to a word I don't know, I can a. almost always figure it out b. sometimes figure it out c. almost never figure it out d. never figure it out	6. I tell my friends about good books I read a. never b. almost never c. some of the time d. a lot
7. When I am reading by myself, I understand a. everything I read b. almost everything I read c. almost none of what I read d. none of what I read	8. People who read a lot are a. very interesting b. interesting c. not very interesting d. boring
9. I am a. a poor reader b. an OK reader c. a good reader d. a very good reader	10. I think libraries are a. a really great place to spend time b. a great place to spend time c. a boring place to spend time d. a really boring place to spend time
11. I worry about what other people think about my reading a. a lot b. sometimes c. almost never d. never	12. I think becoming a good reader is a. not very important b. sort of important c. important d. very important
13. When my teacher asks me a question about what I have read, I a. I can never think of an answer	14. I think spending time reading is a. really boring b. boring

b. I almost never think of an answer c. I sometimes think of an answer d. I can always think of an answer	c. great d. really great
15. Reading is a. very easy for me b. kind of easy for me c. kind of hard for me d. very hard for me	16. When my teacher reads a book out loud, I think it is a. really great b. great c. boring d. really boring
17. When I am in a group talking about stories, I a. I hate to talk about my ideas b. I don't like to talk about my ideas c. I like to talk about my ideas d. I love to talk about my ideas	18. When I have free time, I spend a. none of my time reading b. very little of my time reading c. some of my time reading d. a lot of my time reading
19. When I read out loud, I am a a. poor reader b. OK reader c. good reader d. very good reader	20. When someone gives me a book for a present, a. I am very happy b. I am sort of happy c. I am unhappy d. I am very unhappy

MRP-R Reading Survey Scoring Guidelines

Use the scales below to record the scores for each student.

*Recording scale: a = 1, b = 2, c = 3, d = 4

Recoding scale: a = 4, b = 3, c = 2, d = 1 — Recode items marked with an *

Self-Concept as a Reader	Value of Reading
1. _____	*2. _____
3. _____	4. _____
*5. _____	*6. _____
7. _____	8. _____
*9. _____	10. _____
*11. _____	*12. _____
*13. _____	*14. _____
15. _____	16. _____
*17. _____	*18. _____

*19. _____	20. _____
SC Score: _____	V Score: _____
SC Scores + V Score: _____	

Percentage Scores: Self-Concept (SC/40):
Value (V/40):
Full Survey (Total/80):

APPENDIX D: DATA COLLECTION

The Reader Self-Perception Scale

[redacted]

The Reader Self-Perception Scale

Listed below are statements about reading. Please read each statement carefully. Then circle the letters that show how much you agree or disagree with the statement. Use the following:

SA = Strongly Agree
A = Agree
U = Undecided
D = Disagree
SD = Strongly Disagree

Example: **I think pizza with pepperoni is the best.** SA A U D SD

If you are *really positive* that pepperoni pizza is best, circle SA (Strongly Agree).
If you *think* that is good but maybe not great, circle A (Agree).
If you *can't decide* whether or not it is best, circle U (undecided).
If you *think* that pepperoni pizza is not all that good, circle D (Disagree).
If you are *really positive* that pepperoni pizza is not very good, circle SD (Strongly Disagree).

	1. I think I am a good reader.	SA A U D SD
[SF]	2. I can tell that my teacher likes to listen to me read.	SA A U D SD
[SF]	3. My teacher thinks that my reading is fine.	SA A U D SD
[OC]	4. I read faster than other kids.	SA A U D SD
[PS]	5. I like to read aloud.	SA A U D SD
[OC]	6. When I read, I can figure out words better than other kids.	SA A U D SD
[SF]	7. My classmates like to listen to me read.	SA A U D SD
[PS]	8. I feel good inside when I read.	SA A U D SD
[SF]	9. My classmates think that I read pretty well.	SA A U D SD
[PR]	10. When I read, I don't have to try as hard as I used to.	SA A U D SD
[OC]	11. I seem to know more words than other kids when I read.	SA A U D SD
[SF]	12. People in my family think I am a good reader.	SA A U D SD
[PR]	13. I am getting better at reading.	SA A U D SD
[OC]	14. I understand what I read as well as other kids do.	SA A U D SD
[PR]	15. When I read, I need less help than I used to.	SA A U D SD
[PS]	16. Reading makes me feel happy inside.	SA A U D SD
[SF]	17. My teacher thinks I am a good reader.	SA A U D SD
[PR]	18. Reading is easier for me than it used to be.	SA A U D SD
[PR]	19. I read faster than I could before.	SA A U D SD
[OC]	20. I read better than other kids in my class.	SA A U D SD

(continued)

[redacted]

The Reader Self-Perception Scale

[PS]	21. I feel calm when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[OC]	22. I read more than other kids.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	23. I understand what I read better than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	24. I can figure out words better than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	25. I feel comfortable when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	26. I think reading is relaxing.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	27. I read better now than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PR]	28. When I read, I recognize more words than I used to.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	29. Reading makes me feel good.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	30. Other kids think I'm a good reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	31. People in my family think I read pretty well.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[PS]	32. I enjoy reading.	SA	A	U	D	SD
[SF]	33. People in my family like to listen to me read.	SA	A	U	D	SD

[redacted]

The Reader Self-Perception Scale scoring sheet

Student name _____

Teacher _____

Grade _____ Date _____

Scoring key: 5 = Strongly Agree (SA)
4 = Agree (A)
3 = Undecided (U)
2 = Disagree (D)
1 = Strongly Disagree (SD)

Scales

General Perception	Progress	Observational Comparison	Social Feedback	Physiological States
1. ____	10. ____	4. ____	2. ____	5. ____
	13. ____	6. ____	3. ____	8. ____
	15. ____	11. ____	7. ____	16. ____
	18. ____	14. ____	9. ____	21. ____
	19. ____	20. ____	12. ____	25. ____
	23. ____	22. ____	17. ____	26. ____
	24. ____		30. ____	29. ____
	27. ____		31. ____	32. ____
	28. ____		33. ____	
Raw score	____ of 45	____ of 30	____ of 45	____of 40

Score interpretation				
High	44+	26+	38+	37+
Average	39	21	33	31
Low	34	16	27	25



The Reader Self-Perception Scale
Directions for administration, scoring, and interpretation

The Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) is intended to provide an assessment of how children feel about themselves as readers. The scale consists of 33 items that assess self-perceptions along four dimensions of self-efficacy (Progress, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback, and Physiological States). Children are asked to indicate how strongly they agree or disagree with each statement on a 5-point scale (5 = Strongly Agree, 1 = Strongly Disagree). The information gained from this scale can be used to devise ways to enhance children's self-esteem in reading and, ideally, to increase their motivation to read. The following directions explain specifically what you are to do.

Administration

For the results to be of any use, the children must: (a) understand exactly what they are to do, (b) have sufficient time to complete all items, and (c) respond honestly and thoughtfully. Briefly explain to the children that they are being asked to complete a questionnaire about reading. Emphasize that this is not a *test* and that there are no *right* answers. Tell them that they should be as honest as possible because their responses will be confidential. Ask the children to fill in their names, grade levels, and classrooms as appropriate. Read the directions aloud and work through the example with the students as a group. Discuss the response options and make sure that all children understand the rating scale before moving on. It is important that children know that they may raise their hands to ask questions about any words or ideas they do not understand.

The children should then read each item and circle their response for the item. They should work at their own pace. Remind the children that they should be sure to respond to all items. When all items are completed, the children should stop, put their pencils down, and wait for further instructions. Care should be taken that children who work more slowly are not disturbed by children who have already finished.

Scoring

To score the RSPS, enter the following point values for each response on the RSPS scoring sheet (Strongly Agree = 5, Agree = 4, Undecided = 3, Disagree = 2, Strongly Disagree = 1) for each item number under the appropriate scale. Sum each column to obtain a raw score for each of the four specific scales.

Interpretation

Each scale is interpreted in relation to its total possible score. For example, because the RSPS uses a 5-point scale and the Progress scale consists of 9 items, the highest total score for Progress is 45 ($9 \times 5 = 45$). Therefore, a score that would fall approximately in the middle of the range (22–23) would indicate a child's somewhat indifferent perception of her or himself as a reader with respect to Progress. Note that each scale has a different possible total raw score (Progress = 45, Observational Comparison = 30, Social Feedback = 45, and Physiological States = 40) and should be interpreted accordingly.

As a further aid to interpretation, Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics by grade level for each scale. The raw score of a group or individual can be compared to that of the pilot study group at each grade level.

APPENDIX E: DATA COLLECTION

Student Interview Protocol

Research Protocol for Student Interview

Who Am I As a Reader? Voices of Underrepresented Rural Students with Specific Learning Disability

Participant Pseudonym: _____

STUDENT INTERVIEW

Background and Rapport Building
SCRIPT: Welcome, and thank you for meeting with me today to participate in this interview. My name is Marti Limbocker, and I am a doctoral student at the University of Oklahoma, Jeannine Rainbolt School of Education, conducting my dissertation research. You have been invited to participate in this interview because you are an upper elementary student who has been identified as having a learning disability. Through this study, I hope to better understand how you view yourself as a reader. We call that reader identity. I also want to learn what factors influence you to read or not to read. I anticipate that this interview will take about 30 minutes, but we can talk for longer if we need to and you are able to; this way, you will have time to answer all the questions, and we'll have time to discuss in more depth some of the answers you give it will be an interesting conversation for both of us. Still, you can ask to stop the interview anytime or skip any question you do not want to answer. Your participation is entirely voluntary. Your honest answers will help me to understand your feelings and thoughts about reading. I want to know how you feel about reading inside and outside school. Everything you say to me will be completely anonymous and confidential, and you may withdraw your participation or stop participating at any time without consequence. I would like your permission to audio record this interview because I don't want to miss any of your responses, but if you wish to discontinue the recording or the interview itself, just let

me know. <Pause here for feedback.> How does this feel? Are you comfortable with the format? Do you have any questions?

Let's begin the interview. Please let me know if you need to stop or take a break.

Background / Rapport-Building Questions

1. Tell me a bit about yourself.
2. What are some of your favorite after-school activities? What do you do when you are not at school?
3. How do you like school?

Questions Related to Reader Identity

SCRIPT:
As you know, a part of my study is to understand how you view yourself as a reader, so I would like to ask you some questions about this. Literacy and reading mean different things to different people. There is no right or wrong answer here.

3. [How do you define reading?] What does reading mean to you? If you were writing a definition of *reading* for a dictionary, what would it be? Can you tell me more? [If the child brings up value statements about reading, then ask more about good or bad reader.]
4. Where do you read at school?
5. What are some reasons for reading? Why do people read? Why do kids read? Why do grown-ups read?
6. Why do you read, or why might you read? Why do people read? Is that why you read?
7. How can reading help you in life? How can reading help kids?
8. How can reading help you when you grow up?
9. When your teachers talk about reading, what do they talk about?
10. Tell me about you as a reader.
    - What do you read? What kinds of things do you like to read? This may include books, magazines, online articles or messages, environmental print (like reading street signs), or any other reading you can think of.
    - What are the things you like to read about?
    - What are some books you like to read?
    - What kind of reading do you enjoy most?
    - What do you read outside of school?
11. How do you feel about reading?
    - What is your favorite book or character?
    - How do you feel about reading alone or with someone?

Can you think of a time when reading made you happy or sad? What happened?

Can you think of a time when reading was easier or harder?

What are some favorite ways to practice reading that make reading easier?

How do you feel when you finish a book?

Tell me how you feel about reading in school.

Tell me about a time when you felt really proud of yourself for overcoming a reading challenge.

12. How do you like to read what you write?

13. What help from your teachers makes reading easier or better for you?

14. What reading materials do you have at home? This may include books, magazines, computer programs (digital media), recipes, game directions, directions to put together bicycles, or other reading material.

15. What kinds of things other than books do you read at home? (e.g., eBooks, computer/laptop/iPad, Internet, email, blog, IM, X, Facebook, post, chat, Tik Tok, Instagram, etc.)

16. What do your family members (these may be parents/foster parents, grandparents, siblings, or family friends or relatives) usually read? How often do they read? Do they read at a particular time?

17. Do they talk about what they read? What do they say?

18. How often do they read to you or with you?

19. How does your family encourage you to read? How do they do that?

20. Where do you like to read? Do you have a special place at home (or another relative's home, like grandma's)? Tell me about it.

21. How are reading and writing tied to your after-school activities? How do you use reading and writing when you do these activities?

22. How would you like to use reading in your life now?

23. How can reading help you when you grow up? How would you use reading in the future? In your job? In your hobbies…Imagine yourself in the future when you are 20 or 30. How do you think you might use reading to get your driver's license or solve a problem like changing a tire?

24. Describe a time when you saw people in your neighborhood use reading in their daily lives.

25. Do you have anything else you would like to share with me about your reading?

SCRIPT:
Thank you for participating in this interview. It has been very valuable for me, and your participation helps my studies greatly. You have given me some great information here. After listening to and transcribing the recording, I sometimes realize I wish I had asked a couple more questions. If that happens, is it OK if I schedule a follow-up interview? Do you have any other questions for me before I go?

APPENDIX F: DATA COLLECTION

How Data Will Be Analyzed

Instrument	How data will be analyzed
Motivation to Read Profile (MRP)	Using a spreadsheet like Excel, I will create headings for each item by number and list students' names in the first column. Using the scoring guidelines to determine the score for each item, I will write the score in the margin beside the item number on the student copy of the reading survey and then input scores into the spreadsheet. Odd-numbered items give a self-concept score, and adding even-numbered items provides a value with a score. A total score is created by adding the two scores together. Outlier scores, either high or low, will be highlighted in yellow on the spreadsheet. I will look across the spreadsheet at individual student responses and responses as a whole. I will look for trends in the answers, noting trends at the bottom of the spreadsheet (Malloy et al., 2014).
The Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS)	Students' scores will be entered into a spreadsheet, like Excel, with headings for each scale (progress, observational comparison, social feedback, and physiological states) and a list of students' names in the first column. Scoring will be computed by summing the raw scores for each of the four causes using the scoring sheet provided by the instrument. After recording all the responses, I will add the numbers in each column to get a raw score for each scale. Then, the students' raw scores are compared with the norming table provided by the instrument creators. Scores lower than the scale's mean would be concerning (Henk & Melnick, 1995).
Semi-structured Interviews	The six-step reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) will be employed to analyze the interview data. I will also write analytical memos throughout the process, and reflections will include the participants' actions, reactions, and interactions; participants' routines, rituals, rules, roles, and relationships; what I find intriguing, surprising, or disturbing; code choices and their operational definitions; connections, overlap, and patterns among the codes; themes, assertions, propositions; theory; problems with the study; a synthesis of memos; and future directions for the study. This is a recursive process and will require several attempts and readings.

Drawings	Drawings will be examined and compared to develop an original checklist of common features. Features that are present but are not on the original checklist may be added to the checklist. Unique features on each student's drawings will also be noted. In addition, I would like one or two other colleagues to examine the drawings to cross-check my findings and interpretation. I will talk to each student to ensure I interpret their drawing as accurately as possible.