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# Middle-Grades Students' Understandings of What It Means to Read in a High-Stakes Environment

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Teaser Text: What happens when seventh grade students use reader response theory to understand their own and others' reading abilities, needs, and desires?

Middle Grades Students' Understandings of What It Means to  
Read in a High-Stakes Environment

One of my greatest challenges as a middle grades English and reading teacher was to induce my students to read for pleasure. Not only was I certain that the more students read, the more skilled they would become (Wilhelm, 2008), but I was also troubled by the fact that many of my students had never experienced the pleasure of deep, vicarious living-through-books. Unless a book was required, assigned or taken up in class, most of my middle grades students would not choose to read on their own. Through our classroom conversations, I began to realize that for my students, "reading" was a set of skills to be acquired in English Language Arts class through worksheets and performed on high stakes tests.

Early in the year, during what I thought was a deep and challenging conversation about a short story we had just read, a student interrupted to demand to know when we were going to start preparing for the state reading test. His question was accompanied by murmurs of assent and concern. Were Fecho and Botzakis (2007) right when they warned that test preparation may take precedence over student-initiated and led discussion? Did they ever dream that the injunction for test preparation would not come from school administrators or parents, but from students?

I was unwilling to forsake the classroom conversation and push for pleasure reading for the tyranny of test prep. I knew that thinking and learning was improved when authentic classroom discourse turned on students' thoughts, interests and ideas (Hadjiioannou, 2007; Pace, 2006; Townsend & Pace, 2007). Actively engaging students in talk was especially important for

middle grades learners (NMSA, 2010) in an English Language Arts classroom: when students' voices were embraced and welcomed in the classroom, there was a positive effect on students' attitude toward reading (Galda & Beach, 2001; Hadjioannou, 2007; Van Horn, 2000) and reading achievement (Wilhelm, 2008). I knew these important ideas, but my students did not. With trouble brewing in my classroom, I engaged in a practitioner inquiry that sought to address the following research question: **How can I work with and against students' understandings of literacy in ways that challenge their views while honoring their voices, passions and interests?**

To share my journey, I first describe my perspectives on literacy and the two theories that guided my work with seventh graders. I then tell the story behind my research question, and in a separate "Methods" section, describe the school, classroom context, how this research was conducted, and what my students and I found. Finally, using examples from classroom conversations and students' reading journals, I illustrate and describe those findings.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

What students bring to their understandings of texts is multimodal and multifaceted (Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear & Leu, 2008; Street, 2005) and deeply impacted by and reflective of students' social, emotional and cultural experiences. I wanted my students to understand literacy as deeper than reading and writing for a state test. I wanted them to see that reading the word meant reading the world (Freire & Macedo, 1998). I wanted them to see themselves as agentic, active, consumers and producers of literacy (Spire, Kerkhoff & Graham, 2016). Theories that position the idea of reading as an active, creative process include Rosenblatt's (1978)

*Transactional Theory* and Langer's (2011) *Envisionments*, and these were the theories that I introduced to my seventh graders.

In Rosenblatt's (1978) conception of a responsive reader, the act of reading is an act of construction: in a "transaction" between the reader and text, a new experience is formed. I introduced students to two broad stances that Rosenblatt describes as being adopted by readers—an efferent stance, which focuses on the content or knowledge that readers take away from the text, and an aesthetic stance, which focuses on the experience of textual engagement—what the reader "lives through." Rosenblatt points out that these stances are not in opposition to each other, but experienced on a continuum of efferent and aesthetic experiences according to the attention and focus of the reader.

Langer's (2011) theory of reading places a similar emphasis on the agency and efforts of the reader. She focuses on what the reader "envisions" while reading, and explains,

Envisionments are text-worlds in the mind that differ from individual to individual. They are a function of one's personal and cultural experiences, one's relationship to the current experience, what one knows, how one feels, and what one is after." (p. 10)

Langer (2011) identifies five "envisionments" that readers experience: each describes a state or stage of interaction with texts. Langer's five stances can help teachers and students conceptualize and articulate their relationship to a text. Struggling readers, for example, may have difficulty "stepping in" to a text, while proficient readers regularly step in and out of texts, objectifying their experiences and exploring topics on their own. Helping students to understand *where they are* in relation to their envisionment can facilitate a metacognitive understanding of their own reading. The table below briefly describes each envisionment and illustrates how it was manifested in students' reading journals.

The instructional questions I asked were not only designed to help students understand their relationship to the text, but also the nature of their participation while in and out of the different stances. I wanted them to understand that while reading, they produced and generated knowledge (Fish, 1980; Rosenblatt, 1978; 1993). If my students could see themselves in this position of power, I theorized, it might have a positive influence on their attitudes and understandings about reading.

[Table 1]

To facilitate engagement in reading, foster self-understanding, and help students see themselves as active agents, I introduced Rosenblatt's (1978) stances and led students through a highly scaffolded reading of Langer's (2011) envisionments. The language and ideas gleaned from both theories helped give us the words to inform and enhance our discussions of reading.

### **Story of the Research Question**

I did not begin this practitioner inquiry intending to teach reading theory. In early December of the school year in which this work took place, the social studies teacher and I planned an interdisciplinary unit on the American Revolution: he would teach the historical content, and I would teach students how to write a research paper on a self-selected topic related to the American Revolution. Students immediately wanted to know, "Why are we reading about social studies in language arts?" Silent Bob (all students' names are self-selected pseudonyms) answered, "So we learn how to write like a textbook...[and like] the reading test." Maxine said, "It helps us know how to read a textbook so we can impress a teacher." The ideas that reading and writing were related to doing well on tests and impressing teachers pervaded class discussions. I worried about their focus on tests and doing well to "sound smart." Yet their

motivation to achieve was palpable and I decided to take advantage of it. That week I wrote in my journal, "...they are so eager to try new things and do tasks beyond their abilities. I should do more to tap into that. I think this class would LOVE theory, reading theory." When I introduced the idea of learning reading theory as a way "to know as much as the test-makers in [state capital] who make the tests you are forced to take," there was a roar of approval in the classroom. What I did not realize then was that the idea of reading for pleasure was getting bound up in the idea of reading to improve skills. As we will see in the next section, I only understood this later with the help of my students.

## **Methods**

### **Classroom Context and Participants**

This practitioner inquiry took place at a large, diverse, urban middle school (see Table 2). The class chosen for this study had 30 students who reflected the school's racial and academic diversity: there were five Asian Americans, eleven Whites, seven African Americans, and seven Hispanics. Six students in the class received special education services. Academically, the students reflected a cross-section of abilities as measured by their 6<sup>th</sup> grade state reading scores: one student entered seventh grade scoring at Level 1: "Far below standards." Twelve students scored at Level 2: "Below standards." The remaining 17 students scored at Level 3, "Meets standards." No student scored at Level 4, "Exceeds standards."

From Monday through Thursday, we engaged in group work and conversations about different ELA topics, but Fridays were devoted to independent reading. Students read any book and any genre that interested them. Sometimes we shared favorite books and pieces of our reading journals, but mostly we just read.

[Table 2]

### **Researcher's Positionality**

After spending 10 years at home with young children and at school earning a doctorate, I was anxious to return to the middle grades classroom where I had begun my teaching career. I was especially excited to bring what I, as a white, middle class, English-speaking female educator had learned about culturally responsive pedagogy and the value of teacher research and knowledge to a diverse urban classroom. My aim was to examine how culturally responsive literature could engage diverse groups of students and facilitate grand conversations about life, literature, and literacies. My students, however, had different needs and interests, and being culturally responsive in this school and in this class meant that I had to meet their need and desire for reading test preparation.

I also found that the culture of the school had changed. I remembered a place where students' projects and work covered the cinderblock walls. Classrooms now were plastered with content area standards on which every lesson plan needed to be based. When the school counselor visited the seventh grade ELA classrooms in November, the high stakes forces at work in the changed culture began to make sense to me. Not only was the school's publically accessible "report card" influenced by standardized test scores, but students themselves were deeply impacted by the outcomes. Their score on the state reading test in seventh grade had a direct impact on their chances for entry into a desirable high school. Below is a timeline of the processes in which middle grades students in this large, urban city engage in order to gain entrance into a quality high school.

[Table 3]

Being a culturally responsive teacher meant understanding the larger context of the school's challenges. The stakes involved were high indeed, and from my perspective as a teacher, no one felt these pressures more than my students.

### **Data Sources**

I used student work, or “data of practice” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), to help inform and construct local knowledge with students about their literacies (Sandretto & Tilson, 2016). Data of practice included: reading journals and interviews from five students purposely selected to provide a representative range of the class in terms of gender, ethnicity, reading scores and quality of reading journal responses; my daily reflections on practice; and data from several classroom conversations that were audio-taped and selectively transcribed when students discussed their ideas of reading.

To help illustrate the different facets of student understanding, I use examples from the journals of five students who represented the class in terms of reading and diversity (all ethnicities mentioned here are self-identified): Mary, an Asian-American and avid reader and writer; Rocky, a Pakistani-American and reluctant reader of fiction; Jody, an African-American and avid reader but reluctant writer; Sebastian, White and occasional reader of fiction but reluctant writer; and Sandy, a Dominican who despised reading and hated writing.

Each Friday, I took the week's data of practice and entered it into NVivo, a qualitative analysis tool, to facilitate coding for patterns and help me link similar codes to detect trends and larger categories in my students' literary understandings. This ongoing data analysis also facilitated the process of member checking. For example, a category that developed based on student interest and participation was reading=skills/pleasure/fun. The pleasure and fun part of



this made no sense to me—in fact, it worried me that students were conflating reading for pleasure with skills and drills. I turned my worry into an analytical tool and took this category back to students. I literally asked them, “What do you think this means?” I truly wanted to see if my students could provide insight and understanding. And they did. They explained that learning specific reading skills helped them earn better grades on their state reading test and therefore increased their chances of gaining a seat at one of the over 700 competitive city-wide high school programs. The “fun” was the ongoing class activities—the speaking, listening and group work activities. Impressed and excited by students’ interpretation and understanding, I continued to bring them emerging categories created from data, and with their help, organized categories into larger themes.

Member checks became an integral and ongoing part of the analytical process. Students’ understandings of their own and others’ literacies were grounded in the data and negotiated, and the following overarching themes were created: Students (1) constructed understandings of self as reader; (2) found pleasure in constructing personalized reading skills and strategies; and (3) reconstructed notions of reading to assert authority and power.

### **Discussion**

After students expressed a desire to learn reading theory, I used their reading journals as a way to introduce Langer’s theory and scaffold understanding of her stances. I showed them the moves they made (see photo) and how these moves related to the stances. I used a part of our white board to stake out a continuum representing Rosenblatt’s (1978) efferent and aesthetic stances so that students could articulate the purpose of their reading, whether it was more for pleasure (aesthetic) or for information (efferent). Students used the language of knowledge from

both theories to explore and articulate their discoveries of themselves as readers. These explorations of their own and others' literacies took place in the private spaces of the reading journal and in classroom conversations.

### **Students Construct Understandings of Self as Reader**

**Exploration of self-as-reader in journals.** Reading journals were spaces where students and I interacted socially and academically. They told me what they were reading, and in order to encourage them to experience Langer's Stance 4, "Stepping out and objectifying the experience and Stance 5, "Leaving an envisionment and going beyond," I asked how the stories, characters and ideas related to their own lives and interests.

Rocky, for example, really disliked reading fiction, but used an enhanced understanding of himself as a reader to try to understand *why* he could not "step into" works of fiction like other students. His entries included insights such as, "They started with Nukes. Nukes lead to war. Then to blood. I just love blood!" And, "He's in love. Love is a topic I tend to stay away from." He realized that for him, non-fiction provided a source of reading pleasure, and fiction was more difficult to "step into."

Rocky's way of leaving an envisionment and going beyond (Langer, 2011) centered on understanding himself as a reader. In one of his final journal entries he wrote, "I learned how to write a reflection about what I read, not just a summary. This has helped me think, and somehow change the way I read... I think about what I've just read, and see how I can relate to it."

Rocky's self-understanding helped him develop a reflective lens on reading that gave him a sense of what he likes to read, and why.

Mary's journal illustrated students' weaving of skills-based reading with exploration of their own responses to literature as they used Langer's stances to "Step Out" (Stance 1), "Rethink" (Stance 3), and "Go Beyond" (Stance 5). In the entry below, Mary also illustrated an easy dance between aesthetic and efferent reading:

...remember when [Langer] said, "When you move 'inside' the story, you are with the characters: when you move 'outside' of the story, you analyze the characters' actions, the plot of the story, the morals or purpose of the story, and your own attitude towards it"? I find this statement very precise. When I go through a door to go to the magical and fantastic world of books, I like to participate with the characters, because I do like to experience the wonderful and tragic events they encounter...when I [go] "out" of the book, I like to examine the characters' actions, saying whether it was a good move or not, the main story development (also known as the plot), the morals or lessons I learned, and the point (purpose) of the story. I finally express my feelings, opinions, or moods, after reading a book. I also want to tell you that I am in and out of the story at the same time.

Mary articulated a deep understanding of her responses to literature and a keen sense of how her reading skills were developing. Mary's metacognitive thinking about her reading and learning helped her create a new envisionment; her deepened understanding enabled her to articulate and navigate her own reading practices.

Sebastian's journal illustrated a trend that I noticed in many journals. After a year of being on the receiving end of my probing questions, he started to ask his own questions. In one of his last journal entries, Sebastian wrote,

Ender created two people, his Brother and Sister, but they were both exaggerated. This made me think. What would I make? What is so deep in my mind and heart that I could create it? It's confusing to think about because it's not what you consciously create, it's what your subconscious mind makes. I wonder what's my strongest thought and how I'd exaggerate it? Would I make it more beautiful or more perfect? Or would I make it more evil and powerful? I wonder.

The significance of this passage may be seen in the kinds of probing questions Sebastian began to ask himself. His quest to understand his reading facilitated a quest to understand himself.

**Exploration of self-as-reader in classroom discussion.** Students also explored their own and others' reading in classroom discussions. Our conversations helped students see themselves as engaged readers who made meaning from texts and constructed important knowledge about what effective, engaged readers did when they read for pleasure or for other purposes. In the excerpt below, students explore and share their construction of strategies for reading history:

MBS: What was your reading last night?

Krispy: It was about Valley Forge

MBS: What do you remember? Anything?

Goody M: I remember the...um that Mrs. Washington sent supplies to some of the troops and that their toes would bleed

MBS: Good. Not that their toes would bleed, good that you remember [light laughter]. Brittany?

Brittany: The parts I remember are the details... ..I read it over and over.

Eddie: You know how you said that it would help you read more, well I think things like that help you like, vision, like what is going on.

MBS. And this is what you guys have been telling me, um, about half of you, that you picture your *self* as a character in the story. You [pointing] you, you,

Student: Me!

In the excerpt above, Eddie showed how she used Langer's (2011) concept of envisionment to explain how she imagined the "story" in history and pictured herself in different

roles. This was one of the strategies students developed in class to help with “boring” social studies reading.

When students shared their experiences of reading, other students in the class nodded along in understanding or wondered what it would be like to have that experience herself. Jody described her stance towards fiction as “aesthetic” (Rosenblatt, 1978). To her, the book world was a real world where she engaged in Langer’s second and third stances with abandon. In one class discussion she explained,

When I get into a book I am really there. If someone disturbs me, I get pissed off... I feel like I’m actually there--I am a bystander, looking at everything that is happening. If something sad happens, I get sad. .... I just see everything that is going on, so that’s why sometimes I felt like going into the book and telling them what’s going on so they wouldn’t be fooled by anything.

When I asked my students, “Who in this class said something about his or her reading that impressed you?” one of my most reluctant readers said, “Jody. She said that Goosebumps is a good book and if you read it you wouldn’t stop reading it. When she said that I went to the library after school and borrowed three Goosebumps books. When I started reading I finished all three of them in one day.”

My injunction for students to read because it would be fun and good for them was not nearly as effective as encouraging my deeply aesthetic, engaged readers to share their visceral experiences of reading theory. Peer influence, a deep and powerful force in middle school (NMSA, 2010), played an important and positive role in connecting students to each other’s reading desires, strategies, and experiences. In the next example, Sandy illustrates how listening to her classmates’ deep experiences with texts motivated her to read herself and then read the word.

### **Students Reconstruct Notions of Reading to Assert Authority and Power**

For Sandy, reading was torture. She scored a level one on her state reading exam, the lowest in the class, and had a paraprofessional specifically assigned to her. For the first two months of class she sat away from other students, refusing to be one of four in a group.

One day in November, during a discussion about content area reading. Sandy broke into the conversation suddenly and loudly, asserting, "Usually I notice that our textbooks aren't really textbooks. They're opinions that are presented as facts." All heads swiveled to the back of the room. Too shocked to ask her to elaborate, I remarked, "Wow, that's great." I collected myself enough to stop her as she was leaving the classroom, and I told her I was impressed with her insights and thinking. I marked this moment in my journal:

Sandy paused outside of class yesterday and glowed, saying, "no one ever said I was smart. No one ever said I was...a good thinker." "You have a brilliant mind," I told her warmly. I wanted to hug her but I didn't. Then she confided, "I was left back and that really made me think I was stupid." Geez. But she is smiling. "Thank you," she tells me, twice. "I feel smart."

The next day, Sandy requested a seat in a group near the front. The shift in seat signaled a shift in motivation and perspective: Sandy actively and avidly participated in classroom conversations, and the topic that interested her most was reading.

Sandy did not evince any of Langer (2011) or Rosenblatt's (1978) experiences of story, but she listened intensely to the experiences of Brittany, Jody, and other avid, aesthetic readers in the class; many of us brought books for Sandy to read, and she tried them all. Book by book, Sandy began to creep into an envisionment, and in an animated interview, she described what that experience felt like.

Sandy: I read a *lot* more than I used to before I took your class.

MBS: Why?

Sandy: I don't know! You made me think about it... I never thought about reading as much as I do when I'm in your class, or because I think you made me look at reading from a totally different point of view. I didn't know that it could be so creative. And fun. And that you could really understand what they're trying to say...I never did that before. That's why I had problems with reading comprehension...And now I can read a book and really get into it—like I can't get “into” it—I just *see* it in my head. And I pretend that I'm part of the story...And I felt so weird when it happened [stepping into an envisionment], I was like, “whoa!” It's just so cool, because I can picture it, I can make pictures in my head about what's going on.

MBS: When you picture yourself in the story, do you picture yourself as one of the characters or do you see yourself as, um, somebody who is with them but invisible?

Sandy: It's kinda like, like what Brittany said? A window? It's like looking “in.” I'm not really part of the story, I'm just looking into the story to see what's going on. It's like watching a movie.

For Sandy, the idea of a text was transformed from “a bunch of stuff put together” to something constructed by an author for a purpose. From the experiences of others in the class, Sandy understood how to “enter” into a story and explained how this “entering” impacted her state testing skills in a positive way. She claimed that for her, for the first time ever, the state reading test “was easy.” She ended the interview by saying, “I think I did really well on the test...because ... I understood it better. And I think that's why reading is more fun now.”

When Sandy uses the word “fun” to describe reading, I experience this practitioner inquiry in a visceral way and avail myself of a few tissues. The categories linking pleasure, reading, self-knowledge and self-reflection coalesce in one girl, one experience, and one story.

### **Students Find Pleasure in Constructing Personalized Reading Skills and Strategies**

When students expressed a desire for explicit instruction of discrete reading skills, I felt obliged to respond but did so in a way that encouraged student participation and construction of knowledge. Once students had completed their research paper on a self-selected topic related to

the American Revolution (e.g. weapons, taverns, disease, specific battles, clothing), I asked them to use the research paper as a sample text for a reading test. First, in groups, I asked them to pick one of the standards hanging around the room and become “experts.” Their job was to construct strategies for answering questions related to that standard. For example, one group decided to become experts in “how to write a summary.” They devised four steps (listed here verbatim): A. get the main points for the chapter, passage, book, movie, etc. and write details. B. select the most important details (main ideas). C. put in order (logical, sequential). D. put everything together in one or two sentences.

After we constructed and explained reading strategies, each student took his or her research paper and used it as a mock state reading test passage. Each student created a multiple choice reading test modeled on the types of questions asked on previous state reading tests (i.e. What is the main idea of paragraph 4? What evidence best supports the author’s claim in lines 9-12? How are the ideas organized in this article?) Once students created the tests, they gave it to each other and the author graded it. Test-takers were allowed to argue with the author for a different answer, and the author could decide to take the “wrong” answer or not. Then students could decide if their scores “counted” as a real test.

As we continued to think and talk about reading, students began to see themselves as experts. Together, we constructed our own understandings and definitions of effective reading. Students’ ideas of reading were transformed by their understanding of what they were doing and constructing as they read.



### **Conclusion**

When I began this study, it was clear that students' conceptions of reading were deeply influenced by high stakes reading tests. Teaching students reading theory helped give them a sense of autonomy and control over their reading skills, abilities and experiences. By understanding their own and other's reading skills and practices in a deeper way, students were encouraged to analyze and construct theories about their own reading skills, comprehension strategies, and the idea of reading itself. Reading became understood as an active process over which they had power and control. I believe this active stance helped reshape their notions of reading. They began to see reading as a creative process—one that manifested differently for each of them. Deeper understandings of reading and of themselves gave them pleasure. It was not the idea of pleasure that I envisioned when I started this study, but it is the one that my students constructed based on their interests, needs, and desires.

Findings from this study offer a grounded look at some ways in which the high-stakes testing environment figures into students' emerging understandings of literacy and offers educators a way to engage middle grades students in constructing their own ideas of effective reading. Findings also suggest that middle grades students can and will find pleasure engaging in higher-order thinking inside of classroom contexts that center on their interests, knowledge and understandings.

At the end of the school year, we learned the results of the state reading test. The state divides students' scores into "levels," so as explained earlier, a student at Level 4 "Exceeds standards," at Level 3 "Meets" standards, at Level 2 is "Below standards," and Level 1 is "Far below" standards. By the end of the school year, 26 out of 30 students in this seventh grade class

achieved one level higher on the official state reading test. Three students moved up two levels. Incredibly, Sandy moved up three levels. In fact, her scaled score ranked her number four in the class, right behind three students who scored at the top Level 4. No students' scores declined. While my students were pleased with their scores, I was pleased to remind them that they accomplished growth and achievement without endless test preparation.

**Take Action!**

1. Set aside time for whole-class conversations about reading so that students can share strategies, stances and experiences.
2. Ask students questions that encourage metacognitive thinking: for example, “How did you imagine yourself in that story?”
3. Select 2 or 3 reading theories to introduce to the class. Use their own reading skills and strategies to facilitate understanding.
4. Use the language of the theories to aid students' understandings of their own and others' reading.
5. Have students keep a blog or journal that records their thinking and wondering about what they are reading and how they are reading it. Respond to them with probing questions.
6. Set aside time during the week for reading—include silent, sustained reading and opportunities for students to share books and ideas about reading.

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More to Explore!

Association for Middle Level Education Website: <https://www.amle.org/>

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*Voices from the Middle* Podcasts: <http://www.ncte.org/journals/vm/podcasts>

Wilhelm, J.D. (2016). *"You gotta BE the book:" Teaching engaged and reflective reading with adolescents* (3rd ed). New York: Teachers College Press.

Table 1

*Understanding Reading Theory (Langer, 2011) in Students' Reader Response Journals*Stance 1. Being Outside and Stepping into an EnvisionmentStudent Action: Searches for understanding of the story

Discusses main ideas

Summarizes what she understands

Instructional Questions\*

Are you enjoying this book? Why? Why not?

What are you finding frustrating?

Stance 2. Being Inside and Moving Through an EnvisionmentStudent Action: Uses personal/text knowledge to build meaning and understanding

Expresses sympathy/empathy for characters

Makes connections between/among life, text, other texts

Instructional Questions

Do these characters remind you of other characters? How?

What do you think will happen next? Why?

Stance 3. Stepping Out and Rethinking What You KnowStudent Action: Reflects on feelings towards book and larger issues raised.

Judges characters' actions

Describes lessons learned

Instructional Questions

How do you feel about what happened?

What concerns does the book raise for you?

Stance 4. Stepping Out and Objectifying the ExperienceStudent Action: Disengages from text to analyze and/or compare to other work

Looks for patterns and themes

Analyzes how story structure, mood and setting impact reading

Instructional Questions

What other books have this kind of structure?

How does the author move you through the story?

Stance 5. Leaving an Envisionment and Going BeyondStudent Action: uses prior envisionment concepts to create new envisionments

Rethinks issues of justice (social/global)

Reflects on self in relation to the book and/or world

Instructional Questions

Have your views on \_\_ changed? How? Why did they change?

How has your self-understanding changed?

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\*Instructional questions are designed to deepen students' understanding of self and text.

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Table 2

*Project Equal Middle School* [pseudonym]

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| <u>Size</u> | <u>Grades served</u> | <u>Racial Diversity</u>   | <u>Economic Data</u>          | <u>ELA Proficiency</u> |
|-------------|----------------------|---|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1572        | 5-8                  | 46% Hispanic<br>13% Black<br>25% White<br>14% Asian<br>02% Other/multi-racial | 72% Title I<br>63% Free lunch | 39%                    |

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Table 3

*Timeline for High School Choice*


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| <u>Grade</u> | <u>Month</u> | <u>Action</u>  | <u>All District Schools</u> | <u>This School</u> |
|--------------|--------------|--|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| 7            | November     | School Counselors visit ELA classrooms to explain impact of 7 <sup>th</sup> grade state test on high school choice | No                          | Yes                |
| 7            | Late March   | Students take the ELA state examination  | Yes                         |                    |
| 7-8          | Summer–Fall  | Students attend citywide high school fairs and open houses   | Yes                         |                    |
| 8            | October      | Students receive high school applications  | Yes                         |                    |
| 8            | November     | School Counselors review process with parents/students   | No                          | Yes                |
| 8            | December     | Students submit top 12 choices for high school   | Yes                         |                    |
| 8            | March        | Each student is matched with one high school   | Yes                         |                    |

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*Note.* Each student receives one of his/her 12 choices. If no high school-student match is made, the student goes to another round of high school selection.

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