Engaged Reading as a Collaborative Transformative Practice

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Abstract
The context of this study is a voluntary modification in teaching focus by four eighth-grade teachers who shifted their instructional focus toward student engagement. They abandoned assigned readings in favor of student-selected, self-paced reading within a collection of high interest materials—primarily young adult fiction that students found personally relevant. Over a 4 year period, among other things, this shift consistently resulted, for the students, in increased reading volume, a reduction in students failing the state test, and changes in peer relationships, self-regulation, and conceptions of self. Increasingly predictable shifts across classes in the nature of classroom activity systems along with increasingly predictable student-level outcomes have been accompanied by a parallel evolutionary shift in the activity of teaching (individually and collectively) among the four teachers, reflected in their relationships, their use of resources, and the objects of their activity. Using Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), we analyze this co-evolution of activity systems and the subjectivities and development of individuals acting within those systems. We examine the inseparable shifts in community and individual activity, and their evolution over three time scales—a 4 year history of change in practice among a small community of teachers, the evolution of their student communities over the course of a school year, and, at the microgenetic level, the moment-to-moment interactional processes that feed the evolution of individuals and the relational properties of their communities.

Keywords
adolescent literature, CHAT (Cultural Historical Activity Theory), classroom interaction, engagement, teacher decision-making

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There is ample evidence that classroom engagement is a significant mediator of academic achievement (Christenson, Wylie, & Reschly, 2012; Guthrie, Wigfield, & You, 2012). This is certainly evident with engaged reading, which also influences aspects of students’ personal, social, and moral development (e.g., Comer Kidd & Castano, 2013; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Lysaker, Tonge, Gauson, & Miller, 2011). Extensive study of the contexts in which engaged reading occurs shows that it is more likely when students have access to personally relevant texts, choice among texts, opportunities to collaborate, and opportunities to learn strategies (Guthrie et al., 2012). However, engagement and engaged reading are generally studied as individual cognitive events invoked by particular contexts rather than as evolving and interacting social systems in which individuals and communities reciprocally influence one another over time and across the breadth of human development. The present study addresses this problem.

The context of this study is a shift in teaching focus by four eighth-grade teachers. At the outset of our work with these teachers, the primary object of their reading instruction was to improve students’ reading competence. Recognizing a disjuncture between their practices at that time and the outcomes they desired, they decided to focus centrally on student engagement, in what Engeström (2011) refers to as a “formative intervention.” They abandoned assigned readings in favor of student-selected, self-paced reading within a collection of primarily young adult fiction that students found personally meaningful. This initial shift resulted in a cascade of changes in learning and teaching over the next 4 years. Consistently, students became individually and collectively engaged, read more, had more positive peer relationships, had better self-regulation, and performed better on the state English Language Arts test (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). Although there were some differences among classes, there were increasingly predictable annual transformations in classroom activity systems and in student-level outcomes. Alongside these annual shifts in classroom activity systems and student subjectivities has been a parallel evolutionary shift in the activity of teaching (individually and collectively) among the four teachers, reflected in their relationships, their use of resources, and the objects of their activity.

Using third-generation cultural historical activity theory (CHAT3), we analyze this co-evolution of activity systems and the subjectivities and development of individuals acting within those systems (Engeström & Gläveanu, 2012; Sannino, Daniels, & Gutiérrez, 2009; Stetsenko, 2008). CHAT3 builds upon previous iterations of activity theory originating with Vygotsky’s (1978) notion of mediated action, followed by Leontyev’s (1978) notion of activity system. CHAT3 emphasizes the interconnectedness among multiple activity systems with partially shared goals. Our analysis identifies the tensions and contradictions that led to ongoing cycles of transformation among the interconnected activity systems associated with engaged reading, and the emotional, relational, and developmental nature of those collective and individual transformations. We examine the shifts in community and individual activity, and their interacting historical evolution over three time scales—a 4 year history of change in practice among a small community of teachers, the evolution of their student communities over the course of a school year, and, at the microgenetic level, the
moment-to-moment interactional processes that feed the evolution of individuals and their communities. More specifically, we explore the following questions:

1. Over the years, what are the historical processes through which teaching activities are transformed, and how do these transformations affect the classroom activity systems?
2. What are the changes in the classroom activity systems over the course of the school year in terms of community, division of labor, mediational tools, subjects, and objects?
3. In what ways are students and teachers transformed and transformative within the relational engagements of the classroom?

Our intention is to contribute to a richer understanding of engaged reading, and to the larger project of “reconciling the view of human development as being a profoundly social process with the view that individual subjectivity and agency make the very process of human development and social life possible” (Stetsenko, 2005, p. 71).

Conceptualizing Classroom Engagement

With few exceptions, research on student engagement has been grounded in a cognitive perspective with a social dimension added on as a fertile context for inducing intellectual engagement and consequent academic achievement (e.g., Christenson et al., 2012). The classroom is viewed as a social context for individual engagement because engagement is seen as an individual and not collective social practice. Individual engagement itself has been divided into multiple forms: behavioral engagement (attention, effort, and persistence), emotional engagement (positive emotions during activity), and cognitive engagement (use of sophisticated strategies; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Each of these forms of engagement is defined at the individual, psychological level rather than as part of a social practice.

A recent example reveals both advances and limitations of this approach. Reeve (2013), recognizing deficiencies in the three identified forms of engagement, introduced a fourth, “agentic engagement,” to represent the active role of students in influencing their learning context. Initially, agentic engagement was viewed as a student communicating desires and possibilities to the teacher. However, Reeve modified this “unidirectional” construct such that “agentic engagement can be viewed . . . also as an ongoing series of dialectical transactions between student and teacher” (p. 580). The construct is a significant addition to cognitive research on student engagement, and potentially casts previous conceptions of engagement—which failed to acknowledge the contributions of student agency—as mere compliance.

Although recognizing student agency in engagement is an important step forward, documenting individual subtypes of engagement has limitations and is very different from studying engagement as a “complex system of systems” that unfolds over time (Deakin Crick, 2012, p. 667). Indeed, the full significance of student agency is hampered not only by a narrowly cognitive focus in research, but also by a limited view of
what is possible in classrooms. The model assumes teacher-directed learning and a classroom consisting of a number of individual learners. It imagines no student-to-student learning, represents learning as merely cognitive rather than as embodied social participation, and fails to account for the emotional, relational, and cultural properties of classroom and school or for transformations in these relationships over time. Furthermore, Reeve (2013) is not sanguine about teachers’ ability to arrange for such engagement without expert help.

Despite increasing recognition that engagement is a relational and cultural phenomenon (Yazzie-Mintz & McCormick, 2012) as much as an individual one, very different conceptions underpin cognitive versus CHAT3 approaches, even when researchers draw on Vygotsky’s work. However, from a cognitive perspective, the primary concern is with the zone of proximal development and individual cognitive scaffolds. By contrast, CHAT3, the extension of Vygotsky’s larger theoretical project, represents the social and cognitive as inseparable. The problem is not simply foregrounding individual cognition rather than social practice. From a CHAT perspective, the person does not exist outside of the relational engagement with other persons and the historical and cultural texture of their lives. Similarly, from a cognitive perspective, motivations are either inside (intrinsic) or outside (extrinsic) the student’s head, the latter minimizing student agency. Such a separation is less sensible within CHAT3, because emotions, behaviors, and cognitions cannot easily be separated from each other or from the cultural-historical activity systems in which they are constructed (Roth, 2009). Deakin Crick (2012) captures this by viewing engagement as embodied social participation, as “prolonged, purposeful and enacted in a sociohistorical trajectory” (pp. 678-679).

Conceptualizing Engaged Reading

Investigations of engaged reading have been influenced by cognitive, individualistic accounts of general classroom engagement and by research defining literacy as collections of cognitive skills and strategies, largely independent of context—what Street (1984) has referred to as an autonomous view of literacy. However, there are complications and tensions. Guthrie and his colleagues’ (Guthrie et al., 2012) extensive work on engaged reading (and, relatedly, motivation) is a case in point. Guthrie and Wigfield (2000) defined engaged readers as “motivated to read, strategic in their approaches to comprehending what they read, knowledgeable in their construction of meaning from text, and socially interactive while reading” (p. 602). Although this favors an autonomous, cognitive view of literacy, the “socially interactive while reading” potentially opens significant alliances with social practice theories. This definition is linked to their conception of motivation. Seven of the 53 items in their revised Motivation for Reading Questionnaire (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997) are classified as “social,” for instance, “I sometimes read to my parents” and “I talk to my friends about what I am reading.” An additional item, “I feel like I make friends with people in good books,” classified as an indicator of “reading involvement,” suggests further that engaged
reading is social not only when engaging with others around a book, but also when immersed in the narrative of the text.

Whereas Guthrie and colleagues have acknowledged a social dimension of engaged reading, others view it as central to the nature of engaged reading (e.g., Fecho, 2013; Ivey & Johnston, 2013; Lysaker & Miller, 2013; Lysaker et al., 2011). Based on Rosenblatt’s (1983) transactional theory, dialogic theory (Hermans, Kempen & Van Loon 1992), and research into children’s development of social imagination (Fernyhough, 2008), this line of research is not simply more focused on the social than on the individual, it theorizes the process of engaged reading quite differently from the autonomous view. It assumes that reading, like other language events, is relational and dialogic and provides opportunities for self- and other-construction. It is consistent with evidence that engaged reading of narratives influences readers’ social imaginations and social behavior (Kaufman & Libby, 2012; Lysaker et al., 2011). From this perspective, engaged reading involves not only skills and strategies and knowledge construction, it implicates the socio-emotional (and thus moral) life of both community and individual.

These social dimensions of engaged reading also stand to complicate largely individualistic research on adolescents’ motivations to read. Survey studies (Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Worthy, Moorman, & Turner, 1999) consistently suggest the importance of access to personally relevant reading materials and choice, conditions students in interviews also view as central to engagement (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). In general, however, these studies have sought to explain and expand the notion of intrinsic motivation, with peers and others as somewhat influential, but with reading still framed as a solo experience. In contrast, using a socio-cultural framework, Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, and Morris (2008) concluded not only that adolescents in out-of-school practices perceived peers as important sources for reading materials but also that reading was “situated within and constructive of social networks” (p. 132). This suggestion of a complex relationship among individual and community motivations in engaged literacy demands examination of community activity as much as, and inseparably from, individual activity.

Engaged Reading Communities, Activity Systems, and Individuals

The tensions reflected in our discussion of engagement and engaged reading are reflective of tensions in the broader fields of psychology, education, and human development around the roles of the social and the individual in accounts of human development in all its epistemological, moral, and relational richness. Individual cognitive accounts represent classroom communities as “contexts” for engagement, but communities are not merely collections of individuals, and a community whose focus is engaged reading is not merely a collection of engaged readers. Communities involve mutual engagement in joint enterprises within which members develop relationships, norms, values, shared understandings, and a shared repertoire of tools and other resources (Wenger, 1998). Human development arises through joint participation in
communities of practice, but individuals contribute to and transform communities through their participation and pursuit of their own ends within the community.

Explaining these relationships and invoking CHAT3, Stetsenko (2008) proposes that we take an “activist transformative stance” toward human development. According to Stetsenko, people are constantly in the process of collaboratively transforming their world while pursuing their goals, and in the process they construct themselves and their world. The process is fundamentally social and draws on accumulated cultural tools (such as language and books), but individuals transform the social practices by generating and repurposing cultural tools in the process of pursuing and taking up new goals (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). Consequently, Stetsenko (2005) calls for us to study human development in terms of “collaborative transformative practice,” exploring the processes of engaged reading as cultural-historical-social practices and examining the ontogenetic and microgenetic processes in and among activity systems. Understanding the historical context of activity means understanding the transformations of objects, ideas, and tools, and the history of contradictions and tensions that engendered the transformations. In CHAT3, the struggles to resolve tensions and contradictions within and among activity systems produce cycles of change, each cycle producing new contradictions. As participants progressively re-theorize the nature and object of the activity, expansive transformations of the system, and thus of the individuals in it, occur. CHAT3 calls for a more complex view of human development and the need to take seriously the emotional and relational nature of human activity (Edwards, 2009; Stetsenko, 2008).

The project brings together individualist and collectivist accounts of human learning and development as processes

implicated in, produced by, and derivative (or made up) of the worldly, practical, purposeful activities of people who together transform their world and are transformed by it and in which each individual human being has an important role to play. (Stetsenko, 2008, p. 474)

It is this theoretical stance we bring to an examination of engaged reading in the present study. We intend to examine these reciprocally related processes of evolution in individual subjectivities and in the community activity systems in which they are enmeshed and which they influence.

**Methodology**

We studied the classrooms of four eighth-grade teachers in one public school who prioritized student engagement in English class by offering students a wide collection of personally relevant young adult literature, inviting them to choose what to read and how to approach their reading, providing opportunities for them to talk about what they read, and removing barriers to reading such as book reviews, journal entries, and comprehension questions. The transformation of English teaching practices in classrooms began in years one and two with a formative intervention in which the initial
goal was to simply increase engaged reading among all students in the eighth-grade English classes as a way to leverage stronger reading skills (Ivey, 2013). A closer look at increasing engagement was initiated by one of the teachers who had a professional relationship with Gay, established through participation in prior research and through serving a 3-year term as teacher-in-residence at her university. He expressed frustration over tensions between the district curriculum defined by a heavy focus on cognitive reading strategy instruction, and the kinds of instruction that seemed to engage students. He noted, in contrast to student response to strategy lessons, the strong engagement levels of ordinarily difficult-to-engage students who had recently discovered the edgy young adult books authored by Ellen Hopkins. Reportedly, students read these books not only during sanctioned independent reading times, but also as the teacher moved on to other activities, between classes, and after school. This key teacher organized a meeting with Gay and the other three eighth-grade English teachers, each of whom shared his frustration to varying degrees, to consider the possibility of expanding engaged reading despite the district emphasis on explicit teaching of strategies. The group then called a meeting with the district director of instruction and the school principal to argue for a formative study to increase engaged reading for all students. Because school test data revealed no measureable improvement with the strategies focus from previous years, and district test scores remained well below the state average, the administrators agreed to support the teachers’ initiative, with Gay as a resource.

During the first year of their collaborative work, teachers reframed their English classes to prioritize engaged reading. Their initial plan, based on existing research (e.g., Ivey & Broaddus, 2001), emphasized extending time to read in class, prioritizing high interest materials, and offering student choice. In contrast to previous years where whole class readings and strategy instruction featured prominently in daily lessons, with independent reading relegated to auxiliary status, teachers centralized student-selected reading of compelling young adult literature supplemented by a daily teacher read aloud, and some strategy instruction when deemed necessary.

During the first and second years, Gay and the teachers collected and examined student engagement data, adjusting their instruction based on their perceptions of what was enhancing or inhibiting student engagement. Their ongoing analyses resulted in additional access and attention to diverse books, particularly multicultural books and books with male protagonists, and proactive one-to-one support for inexperienced readers identifying relevant, accessible books. They also further reduced the frequency of strategy instruction after determining that when students were engaged in what they read, they demonstrated (and often surpassed) the strategic behaviors that were the goal of explicit lessons. Although increasing the volume of engaged reading for each student was initially the primary pedagogical goal, unanticipated outcomes accompanied the instructional shift. First, students reported changing how they thought about their lives and well-being in connection to the texts. Second, they reported considerable parent involvement, including parents reading the books for their own purposes.

During the next 2 years, we documented the processes and nature of engagement through observation and interviews as teachers continued to prioritize the goal of
engagement. The present study is drawn from these data collected with students in the English classes during the final 2 years and with teachers who reported on developments occurring over the full 4-year period. Thus, data considered for the present study were collected in years three and four.

Data Sources

A total of 258 eighth graders (45 percent free/reduced-priced lunch) across the four teachers’ classrooms in years three and four participated in this study. Data include (a) teacher interviews; (b) beginning- and end-of-year interviews with 80 students and an additional 48 end-of-year only interviews; (c) 78 process interviews with students over the course of the fourth year regarding changes in their reading engagements ongoing observations; and (d) observations and audio- and videotapes of classroom practices, book engagements, and discussions.

Teacher interviews. Each year in interviews, we asked teachers directly about the experience of making change: what it was like making the instructional change, whether they were satisfied with it, what they saw as its major consequences, whether it was differentially successful, whether there were drawbacks and difficulties, whether they planned to do anything differently in the future, whether the change had affected them personally or professionally or their relationships with students or colleagues, whether they had advice for others who might make the change in their instruction, and whether there was anything new they would like to learn or think about (see Appendix A).

Student beginning- and end-of-year interviews. In student interviews at the beginning and end of the year, we asked first whether the teacher or others had tried to persuade them to read particular books, and if so, what they did. We asked about the experience of engaged reading, whether students had read something so memorable they kept thinking about it or told someone else about it, whether they talked to others about the books, and who those others were. We asked whether any of this had changed them as a reader or as a person, or whether it had changed anyone else that they had noticed, whether it had changed the way they think about things like their life choices, or changed their relationships with others at school or at home. We asked whether they behaved differently at home, whether they thought differently about their family members, or whether their family members thought differently about them (see Appendices B and C).

Student process interviews. In an effort to learn more specifically about the processes of engagement, during the final year we interviewed students throughout the school year. To identify students who could offer rich descriptions of processes, we surveyed rotating samples of students—approximately a different quarter of students every 2- to 3-week period—about recent changes in their reading or reading-related experiences. At the end of the survey, students were asked to write briefly about the change or lack of change and to indicate whether or not they would like to talk to us about their
experiences. We, then, promptly interviewed students from these samples with a total of 78 interviews across the school year (see Appendix D).

Observations of classroom activities and student discussions. There were, minimally, bi-weekly classroom observations with field notes throughout the 2 years. Over the 2-year course of data collection, we video- or audio-taped 20 student-led conversations ranging from 10 minutes to over an hour in length.

Analysis

We approach analysis through Activity Theory, which is a conceptual framework for making sense of the relationship between human consciousness and activity in a cultural-historical context. The analysis “is not a process of dismembering living activity into separate elements, but of revealing the relations which characterize that activity” (Leontyev, 1977) given that variations exist among the different perspectives of participants and that the system is dynamic and actively evolving. The core elements of activity are an object that binds and motivates the activity, subjects, who, as part of a community and within its rules, participate in the activity using various mediating tools and divisions of labor. A distinction is made between the relatively stable object-oriented activity and shorter-term goal-directed activity. To make this concrete, the object that organized and motivated the classroom activity system—teaching language arts—for the teachers was the students and their learning, initially defined by the outcomes of reading volume and performance on state tests. On the one hand, this motive is grounded in a communal-cultural motive of developing the next generation. On the other, each specific teacher invokes the motive uniquely.

Although the object-motive gives the activity system coherence, internal tensions, disturbances, and contradictions work to destabilize and evolve the system. Within the activity system, participants have goals that motivate actions and, at a third, microanalysis level there are operations and conditions necessary for attaining the goals (Leontyev, 1977). For example, the decision to maximize student engagement was a goal that motivated specific actions and interactions and, over time, produced an expansive transformation of the activity system by changing the collective understanding of the object—the meaning of the teaching and learning of language arts.

We began our analysis with the data from the first year (year three overall). Our analytic strategy was to identify, at each level (teacher community, classroom community through the year, and moment-to-moment classroom interactions), in each data source, and over time, changes in relationships and roles, community, mediating tools, subjects and objects, and the contradictions that instigated them. We first examined, through interview data, participants’ perspectives on the nature, processes, and consequences of change. We sought complementary data from multiple sources, and we looked for relationships among the shifts across embedded activity systems.

Our analysis of the activity system began with the premise of change in the goal of classroom practice since the teachers had intentionally changed their tools from assigned readings to student chosen readings, from class book sets to only one to
three copies of any given book, from classic texts to contemporary young adult narratives. These changes were evident in every data source and were intended to increase the amount of reading and learning. Our challenge was to document the nature and consequences of this shift, particularly the consequences that had not initially been intended. It became evident that the activity systems in the classroom communities were closely linked to the activity system of the community of the four teachers.

Since activities are driven, and rendered meaningful, by the subject’s motives (embedded in goals and objects), we use evidence particularly from teacher and student interviews to understand intentions, complementing them with classroom interactions and field observations. While it can be argued that teachers do not necessarily have access to their motives for activities (Hardman, 2007), we have several reasons for confidence in them. First, there is considerable consistency across data sources. Second, having made deliberate collaborative change in their practice, the teachers had substantial conscious access to their motives and experiences. They had regularly articulated them among themselves, and the changes were not without risk, so they weighed them carefully. Another factor that gave stronger conscious access to motives was the regularity of surprise experienced by the teachers both because students behaved in unexpected ways, and because the shift produced more articulate students who took more responsibility for learning, which produced more time for teachers to observe. Similarly, remarkably articulate student interviews were consistent with classroom observation. Most experienced a sharp contrast between previous instructional experience and their experience in the year of study, giving them ample grounds for conscious reflection. Parents, too, brought changes in students’ behavior to their attention.

**Results**

We begin by examining the historical evolution of the teachers’ activity system over the course of 4 years, drawing on teacher interviews. The teachers’ reports are consistent, but for clarity, we present the history from interviews with one of the teachers. The reported shifts are evident in the nature of their teaching individually and collectively. Second, we examine shifts in the classroom activity systems over the course of a year using student and teacher interviews and classroom observations. These shifts substantially reflect the historical evolution of the practice for the teachers. Finally, we look at examples of moments of transformation as they occur at the microgenetic level.

**Activity System Change for Teachers**

The teachers deliberately set out to change their approach to teaching. They began this process with vastly different experiences, and the community of practice evolved over time. In an interview 3 years into the new approach, Anna reflected on how she had attempted to support engagement long before the whole community of teachers took
up the focus on engaged reading. Specifically, she remembered a transition from using the anthology to using literature circles:

[I] did exactly what it said in the [literature circles] book. I had the groups leveled, and I pitched three or four books, and they all had a vote, and we read a book, and then we read another book. And they each had their assigned jobs and I had the little file folder—you’re the word watcher, you’re the illustrator, you’re the quo ter.

However, she noted that specifying the books and the division of labor in this way was not as successful as she had hoped. Using one of her students as an example, she made clear that psychological engagement was the central goal of the change of instruction:

Paulita never liked reading. But when I paired her with a book—Esperanza Rising—in literature circle, I thought that would be such a good book for those kids. She hated that book! . . . I still wasn’t engaging them. But with [the new approach], they get their choice of the book, so they’re gonna read it. They’re gonna be on fire about it.

As CHAT3 anticipates, it was successive contradictions such as Anna describes that fueled the evolution of the activity system. Becoming “on fire” about a book, Anna would learn, would be linked to changes in the nature of classroom activities. For example, the “status of the class survey,” once a very quick assessment practice at the beginning of reading time to ensure that everyone was reading something and making progress, became, over time, longer as students took the opportunity (sometimes provoked by the teacher) to wax eloquent about a book they were reading, leading to other students writing down the name of the book. Status of the class thus shifted from an assessment and management tool to function as a community—and opportunity-building activity with more students reading and talking about the same books. This was associated with the division of labor in the classroom such that the teacher became positioned less centrally as the controlling figure or the sole authority on what to read. Students took up that authority along with an accompanying shift in agency and identity.

Following these changes, Anna referred to surprise outcomes such as a student who had been a struggle for her but who eventually commented, “I figured out how to choose a book.” She also noted a significant side effect of having a wide range of books—that there were only one to three copies of each book:

It’s wonderful when kids argue about the books. “I wanted to read that one” or “That one’s on my list” or “I’m going to add that to my list.” That’s exciting . . . ‘cause it’s not about the [state tests], you know . . . as adults we do the same thing . . . We have a list of books we want to read, and it’s exciting that 13- and 14-year-olds have that going on. That doesn’t happen with literature circles. That doesn’t happen with an anthology. But that happens now. They’re going to advocate for themselves, and they’ll pick a book themselves. And that’s the exciting part.

Such outcomes, not previously imagined as associated with the object, produced tensions that resulted in their shift to goal status, which is evident in the second year of
interviews. When asked whether there were some students who were not successful with the new approach, Anna observed,

How are you measuring success? ‘Cause I can’t think of a kid who’s not successful with this approach, because they’re their own advocate. . . . They begin to know what they like to read. [gives examples] . . . I think fluency improved. I think if you did a record of how many books they read this year, that’s going to prove it. Knowing that the kids read outside of class, that proves it to me. That they’re reading at home. When they’re in other classrooms and books have to be taken from them. When they talk about books like we do as adults.

Anna’s comments here reflect a shift not only in her goal structure, but also in her consequent interpretation of the object of the activity and an active rejection of the institutional meaning. At the same time, they represent a shift in her stance toward her practice—a shift in the subject of the activity system.

In an interview the following year, Anna was able to articulate the significance of these shifts. After a pause in an interview, she observed that

[The goals] change, don’t they? Books are not the destination like we thought they were. We thought books were the cure (laughing). Not true! I want to see them more compassionate, more empathetic. I want them to see each other without stereotypes. I want them to read without realizing it. I want them to be empowered to choose their own books, to be readers for life . . . That’s a whole shift. I think just getting the books in the classroom, that was the original plan, but that’s not the plan any longer. I think we’ve realized there’s a lot more to it than that.

In other words, as a result of tensions that arise in the system, we see shifts in understanding of the object of the teaching activity along with a shift in the subject of the activity—the identity of the teacher. Anna’s comments reflect an evolution from the initial goal of psychological engagement to the more complex goal of psycho-social development, requiring an understanding of the fundamental embeddedness of the psychological in the social. Engeström (Engeström & Glăveanu, 2012) refers to this sort of transformation fueled by repeated tensions between theorizing and observation as “expansive learning [which] is learning what is not yet there, that is, learning to master a new way of working while designing and implementing that new way of working” (p. 516).

These transformations were also linked to changes in the teaching community. In the first year of the change, the group consisted of the following: one veteran eighth-grade teacher using an anthology with no trade books; one teacher who was a veteran at seventh grade but was teaching her first year at eighth grade and was using assigned book sets; and one teacher who was very experienced at sixth grade, had spent 3 years as teacher in residence at the local university, and was teaching his second year at eighth grade. This teacher included a sustained silent reading period, separate from his main instruction, where the students could read their own books or library books. The fourth teacher, also in her second year in eighth grade after moving from sixth grade,
used this same practice. During the first year together they had agreed they would focus on engagement to get all the students reading more. Gay served as a resource for helping to identify and bring to the classroom the texts that engaged students. The veteran teacher pushed hard to find books that were appealing to boys in particular, and all of the teachers began to develop expertise in trouble shooting unengaged students. During the first year, the books were not as edgy as those the collection would come to include, but there was sufficient success to encourage the teachers. This was the beginning of the new collective activity system.

In the second year, one of the veteran teachers moved to another grade level and was replaced by a first-year teacher for whom the new approach was a personal struggle. The central activity of the four teachers at that point consisted of common lesson planning and managing the distribution and recovery of the new books. However, a goal had been established, and the teachers formed a community around that goal. They continued developing their expertise with the new books and conversing with students around the books. Increasingly, however, changes in teaching practice produced contradictions that demanded new forms of collaboration. For example, their historical practice required them to know each of the books the students read and to have self-contained classrooms. However, there was no way for any one of them to keep up with the range of books they were bringing in. Consequently, they found themselves relying more on each other as resources and sending students to another teacher to capitalize on that teacher’s knowledge of a particular genre of books. As one teacher observed near the beginning of the most recent year,

> We each have our leaning of the genre we really like, very clearly, but we’re all willing to read other stuff, and so we come at it from a different perspective. So that’s really cool as adults to talk about things, or to be able to refer a kid to an adult who I know likes those things. Like I can say, “Mrs. F is the one to go talk to, ‘cause she reads all those books. She can point you in the right direction.” And she’s done the same thing, she’s like, “Go talk to Mrs. T.” So it’s really cool, even if we read the same books. You know we ask kids to rate books zero to ten, I would say, “Uh, it’s a five,” and Anna would say, “Oh, it’s a ten.”

In other words, as teachers confronted the contradiction between their previous teaching activity—that the teacher had to know all the books to teach, and the impossibility of doing so—teaching transformed from an individual to a collective activity, to a system with more fluid boundaries as students and teachers came to view multiple teachers as resources and teaching as not individualistic but collaborative.

Students similarly reported teachers other than their own as influences on their reading and as conversation partners. It became normal during class time for teachers and students on an as-needed basis to go across or down the hall to another classroom to access a needed resource (teacher, student, book). Relationally, teachers saw this not as a threat but as a distributed resource. Over time, this relational pattern became evident at the beginning of the school year as they spend a day introducing books to their combined classes, collaboratively reading and acting out texts, offering students a model of social practice to live into. In other words, shifts in the meaning of the object of
teaching activity were linked to changes in the subjective meaning of the activity, the divisions of labor, and in the nature of the subjects and the nature of the community, as one teacher observed, “It’s made me more open to trying a lot of things. It’s definitely bonded me with co-workers in a way that I don’t think would have happened.”

This historical evolution of the activity system fits well with Kaptelinin and Cole’s (http://lchc.ucsd.edu/People/MCole/Activities.html) description of three phases of participation in collective activities. In the first phase, the collective activity has yet to emerge, which requires the development of a degree of shared understanding of goals, roles, and other conditions, and the establishment of intersubjectivity. In the second phase, once intersubjectivity is established, collective and individual activities are substantially aligned. In the third phase, individuals have essentially internalized aspects of the collective activity. However, this model does not address the dynamic and interactive nature of activity systems. For this, we need to minimally examine two interacting systems. In this instance, we have the embedded classroom activity system.

Classroom Activity System Change Over the Course of the Year

As the above analysis suggests, the changes in the activity of the teachers outside of the classroom are linked to closely related changes in the classroom activity systems. Because there are more books than the teachers can read, and no book sets, and because the initial goal was engaged reading (in the individual sense), teachers recognized that asking comprehension questions was contradictory. Anna explains,

I can sit down next to a kid and say, “I have no clue what this book’s about.” But simple questions, like “Catch me up,” the kid is just spilling it. They are so excited about what they’re reading and they love what they’re reading. They sit and tell you everything. They don’t care whether you know the book or not. They don’t love the affirmation. They just want the avenue to talk. . . . They certainly didn’t do that with an anthology.

This recognition of the shift in division of labor allowed the teachers to distribute the conversation further. For example, when Terrance was unsure about whether or not to read a particular book, Anna advised him, “That was Jamal’s favorite book. You might want to talk with him about it.”

To make the changes in the activity system more apparent, we examine the changes over the course of a school year as the students describe them. Recall that students begin the year with a history of monologic instruction—teacher managed discussions of teacher chosen texts—a situation of limited agency. As one student puts it,

I never used to talk about books a lot . . . because [before] . . . there was a certain book level you had to read and a certain type of book you had to read, and it was just really frustrating.

For students, the year begins with a radical shift in agency with respect to their reading, a shift in the nature of the activity, from compliant reading of a teacher-selected book to reading something of personal relevance. This reflects a shift in community
rules, but also a shift in the available tools (initially, books) and in divisions of labor. The teaching roles—selecting and supplying books, assisting and conversing with learners—are distributed among teacher and students. While being interviewed, one student pointed out that he had just finished one book and was about to start the next in the series and, in fact, “We have someone from our class going down to the library to pick me up the next book right now.” Another reported, “I’ve had a lot of people help me find books and I’m very hard to choose for.”

These changes in distribution of labor became reciprocal, diminishing power asymmetries. For example, one student observed,

I talk to Magdelena about what happens in the books. The books she hasn’t read I give her a little bit of info about it. She can read it when she’s done with her book. And some parts I have to get off my mind and talk through with her. And she helps me get through parts I’m stuck at. I’m either confused or it’s bugging me. Like, then I’ll go back to the book and I figure out what has happened, then I go back and tell her about it.

This relational symmetry is also evident when, for example, one of the teachers sought out a student in a different class to help her think through a book that she, the teacher, had difficulty understanding.

The social transitions not only are evident within the classroom activity system, but also within the nature of engagements with texts. Because the texts are often “intense and disturbing” narratives, students take up residence in the characters’ heads. For example,

- So I can kind of connect with books, and I feel like I’m putting myself in the character’s shoes when I’m reading the book.
- I like the books that are intense. Like I really love this book we got—The Day Before. [describes book] It makes me mad! You want to read the other part of it . . . my sister was yelling at me because I was yelling at the book. She’s like, “Why do you keep yelling at the book?”

In other words, the meaning of “reading” is changed at all levels. Living inside a character’s head provides the experience of a different self (subject), and of others, which many students find transforming. For example Conner describes part of My Bloody Life: The Making of a Latin King (Sanchez, 2000) as evidence of how it changed him. The detail of his telling of the event shows his intense engagement with the main character:

He said, he said, like they handed me a Glock, and I put it in my pants, like shoved it in there, and he said, like, it felt uncomfortable, but I knew it was something I had to do and um, and he said, I was going to kill somebody tonight. And he . . . pointed the gun at the guy who had the sweater and he was gonna shoot him, and he just held it there and he said I just started sweating bullets, I got, I got cold, I got really cold, and Mouse, like Mouse is one of the guys, Mouse came over and took the gun and shot him one or two times in the leg and really shot the girl in the face. He said it went in through her jaw in through
her cheek and out the other side and he said all I could feel was blood all over my face from how close I was to her.

As a consequence of his reading, he noted,

... Like at one point I wanted to join a gang and I read some books and I ended up rethinking—that how it can really change somebody’s life, and, I kind of, I kind of rethought about how, like, if you join the gang it’s gonna change your life. You’re not gonna really do the same stuff, you’re gonna be controlled by someone basically, and I didn’t want to go down that road.

What the students appear to be discovering in the process of engaging in this multiply dialogic activity system is a relational enactment and narrativization of selves that Sugarman and Martin (2011) capture in their observation that

The capacity to make ourselves intentional objects and describe ourselves psychologically creates a space of possibility for self-interpretation, of constructing relations with ourselves, so to speak. In the process of enacting psychological descriptions of ourselves as certain sorts of persons, we become the kinds of beings we are ... this is ... an active structuring of existence. (p. 284)

In other words, students were taking themselves—subjects—as the objects of their activity, aligning with the transformed object of the teachers’ collective activity.

One aspect of the transformation of the students as subjects lies in the evolution of a collective subject—a shift to “we.” In the midst of a class discussion, Samuel said, “You know that song, Don’t Stop Believing? This class should be Don’t Stop Reading, because that’s who we are.” In this “we” he included the teacher as simply another community member. On another occasion, the class was engaged in a discussion and there was a new student in class. Samuel interjected, “Wait, we need to back up for [the new student],” again affirming the collective identity, recognizing the shared history of the collective as a tool, and making an active attempt to bring the new student into that collective. The shared conversational history played an important part in the development of this common narrative such that abbreviated references invoked whole narratives for community members.

We recorded substantive transformations of the subject, reflected in numerous ways particularly in major shifts in student agency. For example, initially, there was silent reading; however, the students’ desire to talk about the books at the point of need led them to negotiate a change in community rules so that quiet talk about the books would be allowed during reading time. On the individual level, we saw examples such as Samuel who, recognizing changes in the division of labor, sought to change the community rules by commenting to his teacher, “You know how you schedule conferences with us? We should schedule them with each other.” Because, unlike the seventh-grade year, the texts and teachers’ interactions around the texts induced a measure of uncertainty such that students found themselves needing to talk with others about the books both to share intense experiences with friends and to solicit their help in
thinking through the uncertainties. This shift takes place over the course of each year. For example, Lamar observed that “we never talked about our books last year, ‘cause I was never hooked with any of the books that we did.” Similarly, at the beginning of the year, when asked whether he talked to anyone about the books he read, Robbie responded, “No. Like this is the first time . . . I don’t really get into a conversation.” By February, he noted, “I talk to, like, Terrence in my class, Max, and these different people. Me and Terrence are the only ones in my class who read Prime Choice.” When asked whether Terrence was his friend before, he added, “Terrence, well, we’ve had our differences. I think we’ve bonded more. We really have.”

Robbie’s comments point to a relational shift in the community that is also linked to shifts in the division of labor, along with the object and the available tools in the activity system. For the students, the new object of the activity system became a deeper understanding of the social world, and who they were becoming or might become in it, in other words, a deeper understanding of self (subject). As Carlos observed,

Like my relationships with my friends do better, cause like, see, like in that book, it showed me not to be cocky . . . Shooting Star and Gym Candy . . . Because like if you’re cocky, you’ll lose most of your friends. And if you try to do something like to just get popular, like fight or do drugs, you don’t get nowhere in life.

This turn toward the self as both subject and object is in line with the shifts at the teacher level represented by Anna’s comments earlier in the article pointing to the goal shift from simply individual engagement to these important transformations of self.

With these shifts in subject and object, there are changes in the available tools, which are no longer just the books one is reading, but also the conversations with others in the community including peers, parents, siblings, and teachers. As Andrea notes,

The more books I read the more things I have in common with a lot more people and the more I talk . . . If I read one book, then there’s a certain amount of people that has read that book, and I talk to them about it. And then I read another book, there’s so much more people that have read that book, too, and there’s people that overlap over a bunch of books . . . Sometimes at lunch some people just come up to me or I’ll go up to them, and I’ll ask them if they have any new or interesting books because we’re always talking about books. That’s what all my friends are—we’re like we feel like such nerds because we always talk about books . . . . if we just finish a book and we want our friends to read it, we’ll be like, “You have to read this book!” . . . That usually happens at lunch, after school, on weekends and stuff. I feel like such a nerd because I always talk about books. But it’s fun.

Andrea also reported sharing books and conversations with her sixth-grade sister, judiciously avoiding ones she feels the sister is not yet ready for. Asked if this happened before this year, she says, “No. That’s new,” indicating, as for many students, a change in the activity systems at home. For example, Conner observed,

It gives me something to talk to my mom about. Instead of just being like, “Hey,” and her being like, “How was your day?” and, “Good,” and I don’t talk to her anymore. [Now] it’s more, I can go and talk to her and it’s not just short conversations, I’ll talk
to her for an hour just about a book. And it hasn’t led to arguments or anything. And I think it’s good how I can talk to her about stuff and not have to worry about arguing with her . . . That made me want to be around my mom even more. Because I didn’t want to lose my mom, you know? . . . [Now] I actually listen. Because I used to not even care. My mom was telling me to go do stuff, and I’d just be like, “No, I’m not doing that.” Or “Mom, you can do it yourself.” And there was one point where I actually got mad at my mom and punched a hole through my door, and I cussed her out. And I regret that now.

In class and out of class, there were changes in the nature of the community. Peers with whom students have conversations are not just those with whom they are familiar, because with few copies of any given book, the choices of conversation partner about that book are limited to those who have read it. Bryn, for example, noted that she had found herself having conversations with unexpected people:

We’ve talked about Love and Leftovers, Identical, um Bittersweet . . . It’s like, OK, there’s this thing where I like to dress different from other people . . . like I wear like band T’s and everything and then the girl will wear like Aeropostale and the cheerleaders’ clothes or whatever and I found myself talking to them about books. Whoa! They’re actually cool to talk to about books and everything. [I also talk to] my friend Rosalee, Misty, Deidra, Eva, Kandi and Jamie.

These changes resulted in substantial transformations of the community of practice. In particular, students point to changes in trust, in social agency, and to a reduction in interpersonal judging and othering (Ivey & Johnston, 2013).

To summarize, the rules that govern classroom reading changed from no choice, to choice, from silence to allowed conversation, from having to stay in class to being able to visit other classes, from being required to attend to lessons to not having to if you were engaged in reading. The spatial arrangements changed too, from rows to groups. The division of labor changed, shifting from asymmetrical power arrangements to symmetrical, with teaching functions and conversational initiatives distributed among the community. The properties of the community itself changed with increasing trust, openness, and acceptance of difference and decreasing cliques. Indeed, students came to see difference as a tool for learning. The function of the books shifted from tools of entertainment to tools for participation in the collective practice (and mind) of the classroom (and beyond), participation that enabled personal and collective development.

There were changes also at other levels of activity. Some students reflected on the books as tools for elevating the strength and speed of their reading. Others reported actually decreasing their reading speed, recognizing that when reading too quickly, they were not as fully engaged with the characters. They also reported slowing down because they needed to take time to talk about the books as they were reading. All these transitions at all levels of the activity system came about as teachers and students recognized contradictions between historical practice and new evidence or circumstance.
The Microgenetics of Activity Change

Vygotsky (1981), the grandfather of activity theory, observed that “social relations or relations of people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relations” (p. 163). Over the 2 years of the classroom study, there were substantial documented transformations in the relationships and, consequently, the community members (subjects) across the school year. Indeed, in the classroom community, it was the evolution of the relationships among community members and the linked transformations of them as subjects that were foundational outcomes and mediators of the transformations of the system. As an example, we explore one interactional thread in which we see how such mediation occurs.

In an interview, Mina pointed out that Marta had given her English class an emotional pitch for *Keeping You a Secret* (Peters, 2003), which caused a number of students to read the book and changed the relational properties of the community. The book explores the complexity of a closeted relationship. Mina observed,

*Keeping You a Secret* is a book that a lot of people, that some people didn’t really want to read because they don’t agree with the whole background of it, the whole gay thing. But some people were really taken to it and then talked to some of the people in our school that are like that. I guess got closer to them, too . . . Marta was the first one to read it in our class, I think. She was saying how she loved it, and how she like cried during some parts and how she laughed. So that helped more of us to read it. It’s really good . . . it probably wouldn’t have been one of my first choices. But people talking about it definitely convinced me to try it out.

With gayness becoming a somewhat acceptable domain of conversation, and Marta and Rachel’s gay status accepted, in a mixed group from different classes, Marta observed,

When I read *Keeping You a Secret*, I thought, “Yeah, like this could happen to me.” Like I’m really glad my mom understands, but my dad was like a complete homophobic. I know if he was still living in my house with my mom I’d be in a situation where I’d have to go live in a lets-be-gay shelter.

From this followed an exploration of such resources and of who in their families does and does not accept the two students who are gay. Then Marta noted:

Marta: This is really awkward. Now all the straight kids are being really, really quiet.
Alan: I don’t know how to get in this conversation.
Marta: I know everyone here supports it . . .
Rachel: They just don’t know how to talk about it.
Alan: I just can’t see how you could kick your kid out of your house just because they choose to live their life one way.

In this segment of the conversation, we see meta-talk in which Marta notices the conversational imbalance and marks it, and Alan explains the nature of the problem.
In the next two conversational turns, Marta and Rachel explore the problem and Alan finds a satisfactory way back into the conversation. Then, Mina offers a resource, “My church—I go to a Unitarian Church—and it accepts . . . They accept homo—oh my god . . . they accept gay people. They’re totally okay with it.” Her self-correction, as if to confirm Rachel’s observation that they don’t know how to talk about it, shows that she does indeed have trouble talking about it, but equally shows the sensitivity she has developed and the diminished judgment of others. Marta asks about the church and Mina gives the name and location then adds, “Scott Sanders, from this school, he goes there. We’re the only ones from this school who go—me, my sister, and Scott. I like my church. I think it’s good to be open to everyone.”

To understand the significance of this comment, it is important to know that Scott’s mothers are gay and that Scott himself is handicapped and on the margins of the community. Gay asks the group whether any of what they have read has made them think about issues of fairness. In the context of discussing the marginalization of gays, Marta makes a connection to Scott: “Yeah. I think if you judge people by their race, or like whether they can walk or not, disabilities . . . ” There follows a discussion connecting Keeping You a Secret and Leftovers (Wiess, 2008) that links these issues to the lack of autonomy of young adults and their resentment of the fact that, as Rachel put it, “It’s like they’re thinking that anyone that’s under the age of 18 can’t think . . . ” a thought that Marta finishes, “. . . for themselves, or make their own decisions.”

In a brief pause, Peter asks, “Do you all have conversations like this all the time?” which produces a vociferous chorus of affirmation. He asks, “In school, out of school?” which receives a unanimous “Both,” to which Alan adds, “Sometimes the conversations break us off into little groups, and we’ll go and talk to a few people.” What we see here at the microgenetic level is the evolution of the relational community, the construction of the significance of difference, and the generalization of this construction from one instance (gayness) to another (handicaps). We also see the use of the books to explore and develop selves. Engagements with books and with peers enable self-work, including “we” as a self-option as new selves are made possible by the activity. Indeed, students, having become aware of books as mediating tools for the development of self, deliberately match their friends to characters in books so that they will have a transformative relationship with that character.

At this microgenetic level, we see how the individual and the community influence each other and how cultural tools initially appropriated by individuals for one goal transform the activity system and make new goals and new tools available and cause tensions with historical practice and theorizing. We also see how institutions and relationships outside the immediate activity system (such as family and church) influence and are influenced by individuals and classroom activity systems. In addition, when Mina recalls Marta sharing in class how she cried and laughed in certain parts of Keeping You a Secret, which “helped more of us to read it,” we see how emotion circulates and is actively used in the community and is a community property, not simply an individual phenomenon. Similarly, to get his friends to read and discuss Response (Volponi, 2005), Akeem found an emotionally laden segment, placed it in front of Xavier, and told him to read it. In the process, Xavier and his
neighbor, Terris, commented on the use of “nigger” and the racism in the book. Another neighbor, Santino, joins in, pointing out that if someone called him a “beaner” he would “take a swing at them.” Xavier tells him that, instead, he “should be chill like Luis,” a character in the book *Perfect Chemistry* (Elkeles, 2008). This deliberate solicitation of emotion-related conversations, and use of a character to make sense of and manage emotional responses are two of the many ways in which the books and the surrounding discourse were used to mediate emotion and relationships. The community had a collective expectation of social-emotional engagement and collaborative production, circulation, and interpretation of emotional experiences inside and outside of books.

**Discussion**

In this study, we examined the evolution of engaged reading through three time scales reflecting the cultural-historical, social, and microgenetic transformations among co-evolving activity systems. We have described the processes through which over 4 years the teachers in the study transformed their teaching and consequently their students’ subjectivities and (reciprocally) their own by focusing instructional attention on engaged reading. Following Stetsenko (2005, 2008), we offer an analysis of the transformation of activity, and the transformation of human subjectivity in the dialectic between subject and object in teaching and learning. The analysis supports Stetsenko’s (2005) argument that transformations of “personhood” are relational transformations and thus simultaneously transformations of culture. Our analysis resists reducing engaged reading to an individual cognitive activity constrained to interactions between a solitary reader and print and divisible into emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and agentive components.

For the students, the introduction of engagement as an instructional goal began with a change (from previous experience) in the available mediating artifacts (personally relevant books), and in the rules governing reading, allowing individual choice and more time to read. In the process of the activity, the students’ engagement transformed the community activity system by increasing the knowledge each student had of others and of themselves, altering the relational properties of the community, and making available a different set of potential goals to pursue. Increasing cognitive engagement in reading, the initial goal, was displaced by the relational and personal consequences of engagement, once teachers and students understood them. Consequently, other dimensions of the activity system were changed, including community rules. Silent reading served the initial goal, but as the significance of conversation around the books became apparent, the rules shifted to allow talk, as necessary, during reading time. Thus, the activity system generated new mediating artifacts (e.g., classroom conversation histories, relationships with peers), new divisions of labor (e.g., teaching was distributed among teachers and students), and new goals (e.g., agentive self-narratives). The relational properties of the community shifted not only toward more symmetrical power relationships, but also toward increased trust and caring and decreased judgment. These transformations altered students’ and teachers’ conceptions of the
nature of the object of the activity—“what we’re doing here”—and of the subject(s)—“who are we?/who am I?”.

Previous studies of engaged reading have documented the conditions or contexts that support individual engagement, including instructional supports and texts (Guthrie et al., 2012; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001) and influential others such as parents, peers, and teachers (e.g., Klauda & Wigfield, 2012). They have focused on answering the question, What does it take for (individual) readers to become engaged? Consistent with these studies, instruction, compelling texts, and influential others were integral to the reading accomplished by individuals in the present study. However, using activity systems as units of analysis helped us to understand the nuances of collective engagement and the possibilities afforded by human agency. Although these teachers initially set out to “motivate” students to read by centralizing personally meaningful texts and time to read, and removing barriers to student autonomy, such as quizzes and written responses, students took up the activity for their collective self. Realizing new goals beyond reading for reading’s sake, students began to view instructional routines, texts, and others as tools for the pursuit of these expanded goals, and modified them to suit their own purposes. This was the case when, for instance, Samuel petitioned for a shift from teacher–student conferences to student–student conferences and when students drew others into the activity, such as Conner’s report that he began to talk to his mother about books he read, recognizing it as a way to strengthen his relationship with her.

There are important parallels and links between the changes in the classroom activity systems and those in the teaching community. Because of teachers’ shared experience with the students interacting around personally meaningful books, their teaching practices became more socially engaging both in the classroom and among each other. Indeed, the activity systems of their classrooms came to parallel and overlap with the activity system of their collective practice. The activity of teaching evolved from an individual to a collaborative construction for both teachers and students. This was accompanied by a transformation of subjectivities, where teachers and students claimed to be more personally open and to have deeper relational bonds.

This process through which teachers are transformed by the engaged reading of their classroom community has not previously been studied. Similarly, teaching has not generally been viewed as a community activity system in relation to engaged reading or classroom engagement. Furthermore, engaged reading has not been viewed as a property of classroom communities. Instead, it has been represented merely as a condition of individual reading. The present study shows, at both the microgenetic and the ontogenetic levels, the transformative evolution of a community of engaged reading (not merely a collection of engaged readers, nor merely a social context conducive to individual engagement). That the community transformations are inseparable from the individual transformations is recognizable in members’ frequent unprompted use of “we” as a form of subjectivity when talking about personal reading experience. It is also recognizable in the abbreviated references to whole units of conversational history in classroom talk (along with self-correction to accommodate new community members). Such abbreviations are the collective equivalent of what Vygotsky (1962) recognized as the typical transformation of
speech as it becomes inner speech in individuals. Similarly, we see students sometimes finishing each other’s thoughts apparently accurately (without correction). Students appeared to recognize and value the dialogic nature of self-in-community, valuing difference and power symmetry as mediating artifacts. Evidence suggests that students would see themselves as essentially incomplete as engaged readers without being in dialogic interaction with other members of the community. This was evident, for example, when Marta publicly noted the conversational imbalance around the subject of gayness, and the need for its repair.

Early in the classroom evolution of engaged reading, the conversations were an artifact of activity, a satisfying relational outcome of engaged contact with a book, but they became recognized as a mediating tool for the agentive construction of self. In other words, it is not that the students came to value reading as an end in itself as is suggested by the concept of “intrinsic motivation.” Engström and Sannino (2010), drawing on the work of Leontyev, explained that in CHAT3, “Motives and motivations are not sought primarily inside individual subjects—they are in the object to be transformed and expanded” (p. 3). In the present study, students recognized the fully social practices of engaged reading as tools for the construction of selves, which had become the object of their activity. Specifically, motives were related to deeper understanding of students’ own social worlds, and an agentive construction of their being and becoming in that world (Stetsenko, 2012)—as Sugarman and Martin (2011) put it, “actively structuring their existence” (p. 284).

The outcomes of the classroom activity system took different forms, but included transformation of the students in ways that included lowered need for closure; greater emotional, behavioral, and academic self-regulation; increased social, academic, and moral agency; increased social imagination; and increased happiness (reported in detail in Ivey & Johnston, 2013). These transformations are inseparable from transformations in the engaged community of readers, which offers the mediating tools collaboratively constructed by the students, including the relational properties of openness, trust, and acceptance, even valuing, of difference. Transformations in the division of labor included a redistribution of the teaching function throughout the community. This shift in student agency came without cost in teacher agency.

In other words, Stetsenko’s term “collaborative transformative practice” is an excellent description of the profoundly social nature of engaged reading and the many ways in which community activity systems and cultural tools influence and are influenced by individual human development. We believe this reciprocal representation suggests some of the shortcomings of studying engaged reading—and engagement more generally—as an individual cognitive event that is separable into behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and agentive components. Fredricks et al. (2004) also noted this problem, preferring to examine interactions among components and to provide “rich characterizations of individuals” (p. 83). Our argument is that engaged reading is a fully social, fully human experience that is simultaneously and inseparably individual, relational, emotional, and collective, and that viewing classroom communities as mere contexts for cognition may be inaccurate and unhelpful. Indeed, even emotion is best not viewed as an individual phenomenon separate from the culture and community (Roth, 2009; Wilce, 2009). Our
data resonate with Lewis and Tierney’s (2011, 2013) critical engagement research in which they document students’ and teachers’ transformative use of emotion. They quote Micciche’s (2007, p. 28) observation that “emotion is dynamic and relational, taking form through collisions of contact . . . between people and the objects, narratives, beliefs, and so forth that we encounter in the world” (Lewis & Tierney, 2013, p. 291). In the present study, students chose books in which they became emotionally engaged. They actively moved these emotional resonances into their talk around the books, often deliberately using them as tools for emotional mediation.

While theoretically important, this research is also fundamentally practical in that the genetic analysis reveals the processes through which students, classroom communities, and teachers can develop. It shows how the dialogic engagement generated by the broad array of personally relevant, narrative books can be reflexively transformative for both individual and community. Approaching the expansion of engaged reading in classrooms this way centralizes the development of personhood (while not ignoring academic achievement) and recognizes engaged reading’s relational, emotional, and agentive nature and the inseparability of self and community.

The present study also contributes to our understanding of teachers’ expansive learning and changing practice. In that context, our third research question—*In what ways are students and teachers transformed and transformative within the relational engagements of the classroom?*—is rarely asked. Although there is indeed a growing body of research using a cultural-historical lens to examine changes in teaching knowledge (e.g., Ellis, Edwards, & Smagorinsky, 2010; Gutiérrez & Vossoughi, 2010), it is largely constrained to novice and preservice teachers. Such studies are limited to short-term examinations of activity, making it nearly impossible to examine the mutual transformations between teacher knowledge and the emotional-relational activity among teachers and students. Studies of change in the knowledge and practice of working teachers over longer time spans have often met with less change than expected and sometimes with lingering tensions among participants (e.g., Ketter & Lewis, 2001; Lewis, Ketter, & Fabos, 2001), symptoms often indicative of activities whose objects are not deemed personally meaningful by participants (Engeström, 2011; Gutiérrez & Penuel, 2014; Ivey & Broaddus, 2007).

By contrast, the present study is long-term. Furthermore, although a researcher contributed, the teachers mutually determined an increase in engaged reading as an initial goal. Significant transformations came about due to the collaborative work of teachers and students, with researchers’ role being to document the change. The study thus magnifies the significance of agency in the evolution of teacher knowledge and practice, and illustrates the synergistic relationships among teachers and students when each is provided a sense of autonomy and a need for collaboration. In this regard, our findings resonate with other recent studies documenting change when researchers’ input serves primarily as a point of departure, a contradiction from which teachers, students, and other insiders formulate and solve problems in their everyday practice. Although empirical examples are rare, McNicholl (2013) provides a related CHAT-based study of a teacher educator and five biology teachers with varying levels and types of experience teaching science. After determining jointly that students’ holistic understandings of science were at risk in a culture emphasizing standardized testing, the teachers explored contradictions in...
their teaching. As in the present study, teachers drew on each other’s expertise as well as students’ perspectives, transforming not only their teaching but also how they viewed each other as resources. In a related study, invoking principles from Exploratory Practice (Allwright, 2003) and Critical Learning Episodes (Kiely, Davies, & Wheeler, 2010), Slimani-Rolls and Kiely (2014) described teachers puzzling over videotapes of their own teaching, paying particular attention to their interactions with students as they tried to understand why students were or were not engaged. In the process, they became more attentive to classroom life and to their role in facilitating interaction (vs. transmitting knowledge) and more aware of the implications of their own actions. Consequently, as in the present study, they came to view student engagement as a reciprocal process.

These studies, along with the present study, suggest the value in studying classroom engagement and its development as simultaneous transformations of person and culture in the intertwined activity systems of classroom and teaching communities. These systems are linked, expanded, and influenced centrally by the emotional and relational nature of communities of practice (Edwards, 2009; Stetsenko, 2008).

**Conclusion**

We intended through this study to contribute to theoretical conversations about the nature of engaged reading. Indeed, our findings suggest that engaged reading is an agentive transformative practice in which individuals are fully engaged with others, both characters in books and those with whom they interact around those books. However, there is an equally important lesson to be learned from the evolution of the learning communities we studied. Faced with the contradiction between their desire for universal student engagement and the status quo, and relatively freed from external directives about how and what to teach about reading, the teachers collaboratively changed the goal and subsequently the meaning of the object of their practice. The relational, emotional, and personhood transformations that ensued complicated their work in surprising and engaging ways, not unlike the engagements their students experienced. Our study suggests that teachers and students alike came to recognize that engaged reading (and teaching) is a transformative act of meaning making by collectivituals (Stetsenko, 2012), a process that depends on contradiction or difference, particularly difference in perspective. In such activity systems, difference does not disqualify participation. It actually qualifies one to be a competent contributing member of the community. It is our hope that our analysis expands the collective imagination regarding what becoming literate means, and regarding what it might take to realize significant cultural and personal transformations in literacy teaching and learning.

**Appendix A**

**Teacher Interview Questions**

1. First, I’d like you to just talk about what it was like making this change in your reading instruction.
2. Are you satisfied with the change? Can you talk about that?
3. What do you see as the major impact on the students?
4. Are there any drawbacks?
5. Are some students not as successful as others with this different approach to instruction?
6. Did you encounter any difficulties in making the change?
7. Were there difficulties you anticipated that didn’t arise after all?
8. Do you have any ongoing concerns about the changes you have made?
9. Is there anything you plan to do differently?
10. Has making this change had any impact on you personally or professionally?
11. Has making this change had any impact on relationships with students, colleagues, or others?
12. Is there anything else you’d like to tell me about the process and consequences of making this curricular change?
13. Would you advise others to take up this approach? What advice would you give them? Is there any advice you would give administrators about how to support this sort of instruction?
14. What about next year? Do you plan to make any further changes? Is there anything new you would like to learn or think about?

Appendix B

Student Interview: Beginning-of-Year

1. Have teachers in past school years done anything that made you interested in reading a certain book? What was it?
2. Have other people in past school years helped you decide to read certain books? Who? What did they do or say that made you want to read?
3. Do you talk with anyone about the books you read? Who do you talk to, and what kinds of things do you talk about?
4. Have you started to read a book in school that you found confusing? What happened with that?
5. Tell me about your reading at home. Do you read? What kinds of things do you read? Do others in your home read?
6. Earlier, you were asked to write about summer reading. If you read in the summer, tell me how summer reading is different from reading in the school year. If you did not read during the summer, tell me why not.
7. Tell me something about your reading in classes other than English (social studies, science, math, etc). What has been interesting or challenging about those experiences?
8. What should someone do (a teacher, for example) if they want to help students in eighth grade have good experiences with reading?
9. What do you hope to learn as a reader this year?
10. Is there anything else you’d like to tell me about your reading?
Appendix C

Student Interview: End-of-Year

1. Have teachers this year done anything that made you interested in reading a certain book? What was it?
2. Have you read something this year that was so memorable you keep thinking about it or you told someone else about it?
3. Has any of this changed the way you think about things? Affected you as a reader? As a person?
4. Have some of the books you’ve been reading made you think about your own life choices?
5. Has anyone else in eighth grade had an out of the ordinary reading experience this year that you know of?
6. Have other people this year helped you decide to read certain books? Who? What did they do or say that made you want to read?
7. Did you find yourself talking to people that you wouldn’t have expected to talk about books?
8. Do you talk with anyone about the books you read? Who do you talk to, and what kinds of things do you talk about? Has any of this changed your relationships with other people?
9. Have your relationships with any of your family members changed this year?
10. Do your family members think differently about you now than they did at the beginning of the year?
11. Do you think about your family members differently now than you did at the beginning of the year?
12. Do you behave differently at home these days?
13. What will happen with your reading this summer?
14. Have you changed as a person this year, do you think? How so?
15. Do you think the reading this year has changed anybody else that you’ve noticed?

Appendix D

Biweekly Student Short Survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES/NO</th>
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<tr>
<td>Have there been any significant events or changes in your reading in the past two weeks?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have there been any significant events or changes in your conversations about what you read in the past two weeks?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have there been any significant events or changes in how you think about things because of what you’ve read in the past two weeks?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have there been any significant events or changes in your relationships with others because of books you’ve read in the past two weeks?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. If you answered YES to any of these questions, please briefly describe the event or change.
Author's note
Gay Ivey and Peter H. Johnston contributed equally to this paper and the authors were listed alphabetically.

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