Narrative Statement , September 19, 2008

The following is a requested "narrative statement on the scholarly interests and goals that animate your teaching, research, service, and outreach." I have organized the narrative around three overarching goals of my work:

- To produce and encourage the production of research on pressing issues in literacy education;
- To improve the quality of educational research preparation; and
- To increase the impact of literacy research on practice.

In discussing each goal I provide specific examples of research, teaching, and service activities and accomplishments toward each of these goals (for a comprehensive listing, please see my vita) and identify one sample of scholarship to exemplify the goal. I have taken care in my discussion to include some of my most recent projects in an effort to provide a sense not just of where I have been but where I am going.

Please note: I have provided citations for specific papers only when they are in preparation or under revision. Please see vita for complete listing of all published papers and other works.

Goal: To Produce and Encourage the Production of Research on Pressing Issues in Literacy Education

I am a strong believer in the value of basic research and in the value of researchers pursuing questions of passionate interest to them, even if they do not seem highly consequential at the time. That said, I believe a substantial portion of the educational research enterprise should be devoted to the most pressing questions and issues of the time. In this time, in my view, two of the most pressing questions we face in literacy education are (1) how to develop citizens who are more sophisticated readers of informational text, and (2) how to close socioeconomic gaps in literacy outcomes. The first question is pressing because this truly is the "information age." There is greater access to information by more people in more places at more times than has ever been the case in human history. This provides great opportunity to conduct more informed lives — lives informed by knowledge about individual health and the health of our planet, about great art and great atrocities, about people and places in our neighborhood and half-a-world away. But this opportunity is only realized to the extent that people can truly access, understand, synthesize, and critique this information. Thus much of my work concerns informational text comprehension (broadly viewed), in particular what we can do in the first decade of life to lay the groundwork for more sophisticated informational text comprehension throughout the lifespan.

While the first question I identified is pressing upon us because of ways in which society has changed, the second question I identified – how to close socioeconomic gaps in literacy outcomes – is pressing upon us in large part because of ways in which society has *not* changed. Despite now centuries-old promises of U.S. public schooling as 'the great equalizer,' substantial disparities remain in the literacy outcomes of students of different socioeconomic backgrounds. With signs of disillusionment and even abandonment of the vision of U.S. public schooling as an equalizing force, and fear about the message our failures send to nations abroad, I see this as a pressing, if age-old

p. 2

question (as well as a moral imperative). I summarize my research efforts related each of the two questions I have identified in the paragraphs that follow.

My research has taken several angles on the question of how to develop citizens who are more sophisticated readers of informational text. In past empirical studies and literature reviews I have asked (a) how much and what kinds of experience with informational text we currently offer students in early schooling and at home; (b) what happens if we start earlier in providing informational text experience to children (also, under revision); and (c) when we start earlier, what kinds of instruction should we provide (please see Scholarship Artifact III for one published example; also, in preparation b). In my most recent work, I have been studying the question of how to assess the fruits of our instruction—how to assess informational reading comprehension in young children. We have developed two assessments of informational reading comprehension for primary grade students: The Concepts of Comprehension Assessment (COCA) and the Informational Strategic Cloze Assessment (ISCA)

Confirmatory factor analyses reveal that these assessments do tap four hypothesized dimensions of informational reading comprehension: use of comprehension strategies, comprehension of graphics in the context of text, vocabulary knowledge and use, and knowledge of informational text features preparation a). My recent work has also dealt with questions about how to help students evaluate the credibility of sources of information. Inspired by the growing problem of students making uncritical use of websites as sources of information, I had developed a heuristic for students to use in evaluating the trustworthiness of websites called WWWDOT (W for Who wrote it? W for Why did they write it? and so on). I am very fortunate that a doctoral student with overlapping interests elected to test this approach in her dissertation study. The study found that students exposed to this approach in only four 30-minute lessons developed a greater awareness of the need to evaluate the credibility of information on the Web and learned to evaluate the credibility of information on websites on a number of different dimensions. However, as a whole their actual judgments of website credibility were not improved (they were improved for a particular subset of the sample), suggesting a focus for future research and development. (We are preparing to submit two research manuscripts and one manuscript for practitioners on this study and approach.)

I have taken the strong stance that although informational reading in young children and digital informational reading in general seem like new topics, there is in fact much past research that can inform our developing understandings in these areas. I have argued that a good deal of what we have learned about print/paper reading can inform our developing understanding of digital reading and that research on comprehension processes and instruction with older students and with narrative text that can inform our work on informational reading comprehension in young children. For this reason, I have worked to become expert in reading comprehension processes and pedagogy not only for pre-primary and primary grade children, who are the focus of my own research, but for older students as well; and I have worked to understand comprehension of other genres, even though my own research focuses heavily on informational text. I am working on chapters on comprehension for the Handbook of Reading Research, Volume IV, the Handbook of Reading Disabilities Research, and the International Handbook of English, Language and Literacy Teaching, and I have contributed to chapters on comprehension for two other handbooks (the International Handbook of Literacy and Technology, Volume II and the Handbook of Language and Literacy Development and Disorders; for the latter, please see Scholarship Artifact II) – I hope this is a sign that I am viewed

as having some expertise in comprehension beyond the niche of informational comprehension in the primary grades.

I have also approached the question of how to close socioeconomic gaps in literacy outcomes from several different angles. Most directly, I have studied the nature of print environments and experiences offered to first grade children in low-SES versus high-SES school settings. As past research in other areas would predict, schools in low-SES settings provide print environments and experiences that were inferior in a number of respects. This finding is important because there is a strong tendency to look at low-SES children's home and communities as the source of literacy achievement gaps, yet schools themselves contribute to these gaps and begin doing so quite early on. Indeed, although I fully acknowledge the importance of working with families to foster children's literacy development, in my work I have been particularly interested in outside-of-the-home mechanisms for setting young children on the path to successful literacy outcomes. I am interested in the role that educational television (with television disproportionately viewed by children of low-SES backgrounds) can play in developing literacy skills and am acutely interested in the role that child care settings (widely attended by children of all SES backgrounds, including large numbers of children of low-SES backgrounds) can play in laying the groundwork for successful literacy outcomes. I have participated in a number of outreach efforts related to this (discussed later) and have begun to work on this issue in my research, having conducted a survey and observational study of the print environments and experiences offered to young children in child care settings in preparation) followed by a study of the impact of professional development for child care providers on promoting literacy among children in their care (., in preparation c).

My efforts to study informational reading have focused strongly on children of low-SES backgrounds. Previous research has found that children in low-SES school settings are afforded even less exposure to and experience with informational text that their high-SES counterparts and informational reading achievement is consistently lower among students of low-SES backgrounds (e.g., NAEP, PIRLS), despite the potential of informational reading and writing as mechanisms for life and social change. For these reasons, it is particularly important to work on developing more sophisticated informational reading skills among students of low-SES backgrounds (also, under revision). Reviews of literature in reading comprehension to which I have contributed have also often dealt explicitly with students of low-SES backgrounds and students who struggle with reading comprehension (disproportionately students of low-SES backgrounds).

In addition to producing my own research on pressing issues in literacy education, I work to encourage such research in the field. Through the Literacy Achievement Research Center (LARC; msularc.org), of which I am Co-Founding Associate Director and current Co-Director, we have supported three symposia on "The Research We Have, the Research We Need" in different areas of research on literacy education, all of which have resulted or will result in edited volumes. These symposia are an effort to bring together top scholars a particular area of research to engage in synthesizing and agenda setting in literacy research. In other forums, I take opportunities to offer my own thoughts on important directions for research and take seriously the "Directions for Future Research" sections of empirical articles and chapters I write.

I also encourage research on pressing issues in education by trying to dispose students toward studying questions worth asking. I open an introductory course I teach on educational

p. 4

inquiry in part with the notion what I call "headline studies" – studies so timely and significant that they reach headline status within their field and even outside of education in the popular press (I share specific examples). In all of the doctoral courses I teach I work to encourage and support students in writing literature reviews and proposals that provide compelling rationales for the study - not only identifying a hole in the research but also in identifying a real and significant problem and/or opportunity in practice. I also engage students in evaluating studies with respect to the significance of study. With my doctoral advisees, I push very hard for even the practicum study to address significant questions and result in publishable manuscripts whenever possible. Too often students' pre-dissertation and even dissertation studies are developed more based on what is convenient or logistically feasible than on real pressing or burning issues for the field. While I do understand the logistical challenges associated with conducting research during the doctoral program, as well as the very real need for research to serve first and foremost as a vehicle for students' development of research skills, I also worry that focusing more on convenience than on what is pressing sends exactly the wrong message to doctoral students at an impressionable time. I am very pleased that some of my advisees' practica and even course papers have been published in top tier journals, something I think is in part testimony to (although not a guarantee of) their studies addressing significant questions.

Goal: To Improve the Quality of Educational Research Preparation

A second major goal of my work is to improve the quality of educational research preparation. I mean this in no way to be condescending to research preparation of previous generations of researchers (which include my research idols), but to say that current times require changes to educational research preparation. Speaking specifically about literacy researchers, although similar points can be made of many areas of educational research, the new generation must deal with a much broader array of research topics as our definitions of literacy have broadened and our understandings of nuances of these topics have deepened; they must be conversant with a wider range of research methodologies and a host of new research technologies; and they have the responsibility of knowing about a much richer history of literacy research than existed even a generation ago (with the ahistorical character of some research and writing in literacy being of particular concern to me).

Of course, the most time-intensive way in which I contribute to educational research preparation comes in my work with students at Michigan State. I have taught and co-taught a number of doctoral-level courses, including Introduction to Educational Inquiry; Research Design in Learning, Technology, and Culture; History of Literacy; and Psychological and Cognitive Aspects of Literacy Learning: Focus on Reading Comprehension. In all of these courses I emphasize the value of a wide range of research methodologies, and the need for the question to drive the research approach. I engage students in many activities designed to develop a critical eye toward research and a disposition to seek rigor in their own inquiry. With my advisees I work early on and on an ongoing basis to identify critical experiences (and resulting knowledge and skills) they will need to be successful researchers in their area(s) of interest. Some of these experiences are obvious, such as pursuing particular courses in research methodology. Others are less so, such as participating in the peer review process (with journals' permission I engage students as coreviewers of manuscripts with me) and securing internships in settings in which they might want to work. I meet with my advisees regularly in a forum we call "salon" to address specific topics related doctoral study, such as the curriculum vita and navigating the publication process. I also strongly encourage students to meet regularly with one another in pairs or small groups to provide feedback

on one another's writing, form partnerships for conducting interrater reliability analyses, and so on. An especially important part of my work with many students is involving them in collaborative research projects during which I work to make visible the ways in which I think through and carry out each aspect of the research process. At the same time, I strongly urge all of my students to work with at least one other researcher during the course of their studies, so that they are exposed to different approaches to research.

It is too early to have a strong sense of the long-term outcomes of students I have advised, but I can share that *all* of my advisees who are at or past the dissertation stage have presented at national conferences and have published in nationally-visible journals or books. Of the 10 doctoral students whom I have advised or whose dissertation I have directed who have graduated or are about to graduate, 9 have taken academic positions either as post-docs (University of California at Berkeley, University of Oregon, University of Pennsylvania) or as Assistant Professors (University of Kentucky, University of Maine, Monmouth College, Radford University, University of Vermont, Winona State University) (the 10th student elected to return to elementary classroom teaching and conducts teacher research). Many of these students have already made high quality contributions to the research literature; time will tell how many and how long lasting their contributions will be.

In addition to working directly with students, I have also done considerable programmatic work in the area of educational research preparation. With and other literacy colleagues, I worked to develop a doctoral specialization in literacy. Among other things, this specialization was designed to provide more training in research methods, including training in both qualitative and quantitative research, more coursework in literacy research, including courses in both sociocultural and cognitive traditions, and a greater understanding of the history of literacy education and research. Seeing now several ways in which our approach to the specialization needs to be revised and updated, this year I will be assisting as he leads an effort to revise the doctoral specialization, continuing to think deeply about research preparation in current times.

As the "Service to the College/University" section of my vita indicates, many of my service activities at Michigan State have focused on improving and supporting our work in educational research training. For example, this past year I served as Chair of the PhD Graduate Program and Policy Committee for the Department of Teacher Education. Colleagues and I made a number of revisions to improve and update our educational research preparation, such as revising and creating new courses in research methods, increasing requirements for coursework in research methods, increasing expectations for students to develop substantial expertise, and making requirements for the practicum/pre-dissertation research more standardized and rigorous. Another recent activity related to research preparation has been serving as a mentor in the McNair/SROP Scholars program, an initiative to increase the number of minority students who pursue careers in research. I have had the opportunity this year to mentor an undergraduate student interested in technology and young children. Together with an incoming doctoral student, we have conducted an interview and survey study on K-2 children's knowledge, perceptions, and use of the Internet. Through this and other McNair/SROP experiences, the Scholar has developed greater knowledge and skill in every phase of research and has a strengthened interest in pursuing educational research. LARC has also taken as one of its mission from its inception to develop the "new generation of literacy scholar-leaders" and our work in LARC continues to have a strong emphasis on developing researchers who can conduct high quality high impact educational research.

I have also worked to improve the quality of educational research training beyond Michigan and I published a piece in *Educational Researcher* drawing on genre theory to argue that education should move toward alternative formats for the dissertation. We argue that having students write the dissertation in more common genres (e.g., as a collection of research articles, as a book manuscript) would better develop students' skill in writing the kinds of texts that they would need to write later in their careers in educational research, push standards for the dissertation to more strongly include publishability, and result in more dissertation studies actually making their way to print. In 2001 and I published a commentary about how preparation for new literacy researchers should change given the increasingly multiepistemological, multi-methodological nature of the field of literacy. and I followed up this piece with an edited volume on literacy research methodologies (please see Instruction Artifact I) in which a broad range of methodologies used in literacy – from experiments to ethnography – are presented in a consistent format: description of the methodology, some history of its use in literacy research, standards of quality for research using this methodology, and an exemplary study in literacy using this methodology with a discussion of what makes it exemplary. Authors of the chapters are literacy researchers highly respected for their research using that methodology and are, by design, a theoretically and even epistemologically diverse group. In the introduction and conclusion to the text we take the position that many different frames for and types of research have important contributions to make to our understanding of literacy education, and that ultimately, the research question should drive the choice of methodology and design. The text was intended primarily for use in the preparation of researchers during doctoral study and it appears that it is primarily being used in doctoral courses. We are finding, however, that the text or chapters within it are being cited by established researchers as well.

Initially inspired by our edited volume, and I are in our fourth year of leading a series of sessions on research methodologies for the National Reading Conference (please see Instruction Artifact II). Intended for graduate students and early career researchers, these sessions are designed to improve knowledge and awareness of different research methodologies and designs. For example, this year we will have speakers focus on recent advances in qualitative research methodologies, quantitative research methodologies, and mixed methodologies.

and I are planning a second edited volume, this one focused on the research design process, based on the series.

Ultimately, of course, one of the most important tools in educational research preparation is existing research. As indicated on my vita, I have regularly contributed to the enterprise of peer review for external funding competitions, journal publications, and research awards.

Goal: To Increase the Impact of Literacy Research On Practice

A third goal that pervades my work in research, teaching, and service is to increase the impact of literacy research on practice. I am sure the reader is well aware of the all-too-common disconnect of research and practice in literacy education. This disconnect is a long-standing concern of mine, in fact one of the things that drew me to the field initially. I am not naïve about the challenge of addressing this issue, but I do think I can perhaps have an impact on it in some small ways. As discussed in the first section of this essay, one thing I do is to work to conduct research on pressing issues; I hope this gives the research at least a little greater chance of impacting practice. Another thing I do is to work to disseminate my research, as well as the research of many esteemed colleagues, through publications and presentations geared toward practitioners. I have published,

often multiple times, in outlets including American Educator, Educational Leadership, Instructor Magazine, Language Arts, The Reading Teacher, Teaching PreK – 8, and Young Children. I have also published a book aimed at practitioners that is based on my and other scholars' research, Reading and Writing Informational Text in the Primary Grades: Research-Based Practices, which has sold over 30,000 copies (please see Scholarship Artifact I). I give presentations about my and others' research, and teaching practices based on this research, throughout the U.S. I recognize that one-shot presentations like these do not by themselves make for high quality professional development, but I work when possible to make them part of a larger fabric of professional development being offered by the district, state, or other organization, and even outside these arrangements I have found that such talks do provide content that at least some teachers, literacy coaches, principals, and others use to inform their own ongoing professional development work. And while all of this presenting cuts into the time I have to conduct and write research, I continue to get the message in a variety of ways that the personal connections I make through face-to-face work have a value that cannot be achieved through publishing and writing. For example, last week I received an email that begins:

I had the fantastic pleasure of hearing you speak a year ago at the Rutgers Conference on Reading and Writing (April, 2007). Your research, applications, and personality captured me that day, and since that time I have been looking for opportunities to apply your work. Putting aside decorum, I thought you were amazing, and I didn't know people like you existed in reading language arts [research]. You blew the doors off my perception.

I think of presenting to practitioners as being about more than disseminating specific research findings and associated practices but rather about being an ambassador for educational research – conveying that research really does offer findings highly relevant to the everyday practice of teaching and learning. In this vein, several years ago I forged a relationship with the National Geographic Society that has resulted in LARC partnering with the Society to produce an annual summer institute to disseminate cutting edge research and practice on developing nonfiction literacy. I have also just recently signed with Heinemann Publishers to edit a new series, called *Practical Research*, designed to disseminate important research findings and associated practices through highly accessible books marketed to practitioners.

I see in newer technologies other ways to help literacy research impact practice. I recently contributed to a podcast on a recent research study; I have conducted a webinar on reading comprehension research and practice with educators throughout New England; I took the lead in developing the LARC (msularc.org) website, which receives approximately 34,000 hits each month; I have been filmed several times for professional development videos made or to be made available via video streaming

Through support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York and LARC, colleagues and I have made our new informational reading comprehension assessments and associated materials, including videos on how to administer and score the assessments, available free for download at the LARC website. I have led an extensive project to use DVD technology to disseminate research-based practices in promoting literacy among children birth to five. In brief, here's the story behind that project: Michigan Governor Granholm and her administration initiated a regulation requiring child care providers (first center providers and providers in home-bases settings as well) to provide at least 30 minutes daily of "developmentally appropriate emergent literacy activity" in order to get or keep their licenses. While exciting in that it

is rare for licensing regulations to focus on content of programming at all, let alone on literacy, this initiative is also problematic in that most providers and even licensing consultants had no idea what "developmentally appropriate emergent literacy activity" means. We were quickly hearing tales of providers attempting to sit toddlers down and read to them for 30 straight minutes and a survey we conducted revealed that large percentages of Michigan providers reported little or no knowledge about emergent literacy. In partnership with the State of Michigan's Child Day Care Licensing Division, Michigan State's Families and Communities Together (FACT) Coalition, and Michigan Community Coordinated Child Care (4C) Association, and with financial support from FACT, LARC, and the Kellogg Foundation, we developed a DVD for child care providers on strategies for promoting literacy in children birth to five, direct-mailed copies of the DVD to all 20,000 licensed child care providers in the State of Michigan, and made the DVD available to professional developers, new licensees, and others. Scholastic, Inc. is now planning to adapt the video to be sold nationally (a contract has not yet been signed). I also co-authored a book on this subject for child care providers, as well as a book on the subject for parents, both sold through Borders and Barnes and Noble bookstores throughout the U.S.

I strongly believe that better partnerships between people whose primary work is research and people whose primary work is professional development would go a long way toward literacy research having a greater impact on practice. There are professional developers whose books, workshops, presentations, and other products reach and impact the practice of many more practitioners than researchers ever do

I have tried to build on this notion by going out of my way to connect with professional developers. This has resulted in my giving research-oriented talks in symposia with professional developers, writing research-oriented chapters in books by professional developers, and writing forwards to and endorsements of books by professional developers that I view as attentive to and/or largely consistent with research.

Along these lines, through the Public Education and Business Coalition (pebc.org), I have partnered with professional developer to lead an effort to bring together top researchers and top professional developers (along with other key stakeholders such publishers of professional books) to work together in the area of elementary literacy education in low income and multilingual settings (please see Service and Outreach Artifact I). Our first Symposium of Research and Practice was held last October with an impressive list of participants and a great deal of positive energy toward forging partnerships to work on the difficult challenges of both this topic and of cross-role collaboration. In the months since the Symposium, PEBC, with input from working on a web-based resource site in this area, including mechanisms to promote social networking among professional developers and researchers. For our second symposium, to be held this October, we will move more deeply into content, with such activities as generating strategies for decreasing use of common teaching practices that are not supported by research, generating strategies for disseminating practices that have proven effective in research but are not widely used in practice (e.g., Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction), and generating strategies for researching educational practices that seem highly promising but have not been tested in research.

In a position statement and I drafted in advance of the first Symposium, we wrote, among other things, about the responsibilities that professional developers have to be attentive to research and the responsibilities that researchers have to make their work relevant and accessible to professional developers (this statement was largely well-received by symposium attendees and will be available soon for larger comment at pebc.org). Toward the latter, I have taken as one of my

roles as a professor to teach doctoral students to write and present research effectively for practitioner audiences. One goal I have had is to ensure that each of my doctoral students leaves our program having been the lead author of at least one publishable piece aimed at practitioners, and I have had many students meet this goal (e.g.,

). I also channel some opportunities to provide professional development to my doctoral students so that they can practice and develop their skills in providing professional development. I have doctoral course assignments that include such things as giving powerpoint presentations on specific research studies to practitioner audiences and developing plans for preservice and inservice lessons that convey research-based content. I have also published a short piece about making one's writing interesting and hope to write more, perhaps in my role as series editor for *Practical Research* (see above), about writing effectively for practitioners.

My preservice and inservice teaching is also an important forum for increasing the impact of literacy research on practice. Syllabi for all of the courses I have taught at these levels are doggedly attentive to the research, with readings, class topics, and class activities consistently supported by an identifiable research base. I believe that many students do come to appreciate this. This past term a masters student wrote, "In previous early childhood classes I have taken they didn't have as much research to support their reasonings. I liked all the research-based information that was presented." A former masters student emailed:

I took a literacy class from you about six or seven years ago at Michigan State. You made research and the importance of that information come alive for me. Some teachers – you just never forget. Even though my experience taking a class from you was kind of like taking a class from one of my very smart daughters, I still found you a very important instructor in my travels to start a teaching career in the area of reading. . .

This said, I continue to struggle with how to involve research in my teaching to greatest benefit. One set of challenges I have been working on is how to marry my advocacy for research with the need for teachers to become critical consumers of research and how to help teachers to read research productively for themselves rather than rely on my and others' translations. Toward this end doctoral student and I have been working on a paper we hope to submit for publication to a practitioner journal called "Ten Things Every Literacy Educator Should Know about Research" which includes, among other things, guidance about how to read research articles, questions to ask of claims that something is "research-based," and so on. A second challenge I have been working on is identifying efficient but informative ways to keep up with the research literature on teacher education itself. As a teacher educator, I should be abreast of developments in this vast literature, but I struggle to do this while also keeping up with the reading in my specific areas of research interest.

I also work to help literacy research impact practice via educational materials. I have worked as a consultant and/or author for Scholastic, Inc., Pearson Learning, and the National Geographic Society on programs and materials to be used in preK – 2 classrooms (by personal policy, I receive no royalties for any of these products). For example, I am author of Scholastic's *Buzz about IT* (the IT is "Informational Text") classroom libraries: collections of some of my favorite informational trade books for reading aloud in grades K, 1, and 2 and lesson plans for use in teaching with these books (please see Service and Outreach Artifact II). I have been working with the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) as a consultant on a television program aimed at increasing

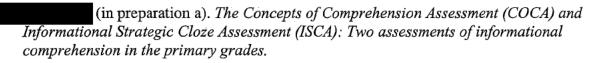
informational literacy skills among first through third graders and as Senior Reading Consultant for the Robotics Institute at Carnegie Mellon University, with whom I am working on computer software designed to use emerging speech recognition capabilities to improve reading comprehension skills in primary grade students. I also publish writings aimed largely or in part at educational publishers.

Summary

Developing citizens who are sophisticated readers of informational text, closing socioeconomic gaps in literacy outcomes, and many other concerns in literacy education are not abating. My aspiration is to inform, in some small way, the work of parents, practitioners, teacher educators, and fellow researchers as they work to address these challenges. As I look down the road, I anticipate continuing to press hard on the issues I have described here, as well as new ones as they arise and challenge us all to keep up with increasing literacy demands.

I want to close with a note of acknowledgment of my mentors. Major mentors for me have included the likes of and With mentors like these, it would be a much more surprising story if hadn't achieved some measure of success in my work than that I had. Most of what I have accomplished is really due to them.

References



(in preparation b). The impact of the Project-Based Approach to Building Informational Literacy (PABIL) on informational reading and writing skills.

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(in preparation). Emergent

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