This study sought to address the reading comprehension needs of struggling readers while also responding to their identities as readers. Rather than segregate struggling readers and give them different instructional experiences, this study considered how their participation with classroom reading practices might be changed if they were able to interact with students who shared similar perceptions about themselves as readers. The research questions were:

1. How do struggling readers participate in small groups when they work together with students who share similar perceptions of themselves as readers?
2. How do experiences differ across groups for struggling readers who have different perceptions?

Findings

Regardless of how they perceived themselves as readers, students who scored as reading below-grade level on the Gates-MacGinitie (2000) limited their participation during the first four to six discussions. However, over time struggling readers began to increase their talk about texts and comprehension strategies. As struggling readers began to increase their participation, they began to take on leadership roles within their groups. By the end of the study, 10 of the 12 groups were led by students who were considered struggling readers.

Saying Little

During the first five discussions, students who read below grade-level accounted for only five percent of all talk about texts and comprehension strategies. Although they answered the questions asked about the texts and filled in their strategy sheets, they rarely volunteered their ideas about texts, asked questions, shared how they used comprehension strategies, or responded to statements their group members made about texts and strategies. Students who read below grade-level made an average of three statements per discussion where they volunteered their ideas or shared questions about texts and strategies. By comparison, students who read above grade-level made an average of 46 such statements per discussion while students who read on grade-level averaged 27.

Example A:

Sarah: Melissa, what strategy helped you the most?
Melissa: I don’t know.
Sarah: What did you write on your paper?
Melissa: I thought, I thought what y’all said was good. The predictions and prior knowledge stuff is good.
Justin: You know what else might help?
Sarah: What?
Justin: Rereading. I read some of this stuff two or three times.

From Saying a Little to Saying More: Increasing Talk about Texts and Strategies

Starting with the sixth discussion and continuing through the twelfth discussion, students who read below grade-level increased their talk about their understandings of text and how they used strategies. During these last seven discussions, students who read below grade-level accounted for 14% of all talk about texts and comprehension strategies nearly tripling their level of participation. Students who read below grade-level volunteered to share their ideas about texts...
and strategies an average of 14 times per discussion. As their level of participation rose, students who read above grade-level decreased their talk to an average of 38 statements and students who read on grade-level increased to an average of 31 statements.

**Example B:**

Isabella: Robin Hood is described as both a hero and an outlaw. Can someone be both?
Elizabeth: I have a good answer to that.
Isabella: Yes?
Elizabeth: He broke the law. He broke the law to help people so he’s a hero. But he broke the law so that’s also bad. Some people won’t like him for that.
Isabella: I said no. You can’t be both. You either like him or you don’t.
Elizabeth: But it said in the reading that people admired him because he did the right thing. See? Look there.
Isabella: I see it.
Elizabeth: So don’t you think that kinda says you can be both? Like have you ever done something where you broke a rule but it was for the right reason? Don’t people have to do that sometimes? Like to help each other out?
Isabella: I guess.

**Taking a Leadership Role**

As struggling readers began to increase their participation, some of them shifted their positions within their groups and took on a leadership role. In their role as leader, struggling readers not only talked more but also directed the discussion. The transition to the role of leader happened between the sixth and eighth discussions. By the end of the eighth discussion, and continuing to the twelfth discussion, 10 of the 12 groups were lead by a student who read below grade level.

**Example C:**

Ava: Everyone, stop goofing off. Let’s talk about what you did today.
Jacob: I read this.
Ava: What, what strategies did you use when you read this? Jacob? What did you do?
Jacob: I used my prior knowledge.
Ava: Why?
Jacob: ’cause I know a lot about knights.
Ava: So like how did that help you? How did you use it?
Leslie: What did it help you learn?

**Conclusion**

Findings from this study suggest that struggling readers can benefit when they have regular opportunities to see other students struggle to make sense of text. Interviews with struggling readers suggested that their decisions related to their understandings of what reading and talking about texts should look like in classrooms. These students appeared to believe that students who they identified as good readers should do the talking because they had the most to offer. Other students should speak only if they had the right answers.

However, as the study progressed students began to see that everyone in their groups had difficulties comprehending texts or using comprehension strategies at various moments. Rather than see reading difficulties as an isolated experience that happened only to them, struggling readers began to see that difficulties with reading could be experienced by anyone at any time and that even those they considered the best readers did not always have the answer. As a result, they began to participate more in discussions.