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DOES SUCCESS FOR ALL IMPACT READING ACHIEVEMENT OF STUDENTS WITH
LEARNING DISABILITIES?

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education in Curriculum and Instruction
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation seeks an answer to the question: “Will students with learning disabilities who were provided reading instruction through the Success For All reading program demonstrate higher reading achievement on selected reading assessments (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test and the Qualitative Reading Inventory-3) than the students with learning disabilities who were provided reading instruction through other reading programs?”

Determining the impact of the Success For All reading program on reading assessment scores will add to the research about effective reading instruction methods for use with students with learning disabilities. The target population of this study was third grade students with learning disabilities in one central Florida school district. Seventeen total participants were included in the final data analysis. Because of the small number of participants, the researcher is reluctant to make generalizations based on the results of this study. However, the results of a logical analysis of the data indicated that the students with learning disabilities who received reading instruction through the Success For All program did not consistently perform better on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test or the Qualitative Reading Inventory-3 reading assessments than the students with learning disabilities who were provided reading instruction through other evidenced-based reading programs.

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents. To my mother, Nancy Carol Smith, thank you for always encouraging me through life's trials. You are my inspiration. To my late father, Allan Prescott Smith, thank you for instilling in me your love of education. I love you both.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Background

Many students with learning disabilities have difficulty in learning to read (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2004). Students with learning disabilities may have difficulty recognizing the position and shape of the letters or words they see, understanding because they do not distinguish subtle differences in sounds, and sequencing and organizing information for comprehension (Silver, L. B., 1998). These difficulties directly relate to hearing sounds in words, reading letters and words in print, and comprehending text. Research shows that students with reading difficulties require explicit, differentiated instruction in specific reading skills in order to overcome these problems (Denton, Vaughn, & Fletcher, 2003).

The target population of this study was students with learning disabilities. Under the definition in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997) specific learning disabilities is defined as:

“Specific learning disability” means a disorder in one or more basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not apply to children who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

In the state of Florida, the diagnostic criteria for learning disabilities are that the student must be of average or above average intelligence, demonstrate a discrepancy between his or her intelligence and actual academic achievement, and demonstrate a discrepancy between his or her

intelligence and cognitive processing (Prevatt & Proctor, 2004). The Florida definition of learning disability under the Special Programs and Procedures for Exceptional Students (Florida Department of Education [FDOE], 2004b) states:

Specific learning disabilities refers to a heterogeneous group of psychological processing disorders manifested by significant difficulties in the acquisition and use of language, reading, writing, or mathematics. These disorders are intrinsic to the individual and may occur across the life span. Although specific learning disabilities may occur concomitantly with other handicapping conditions or with extrinsic influences, the disabilities are not primarily the result of those conditions or influences. (p. 141)

In 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized with the IDEA 2004 federal regulations becoming effective on October 13, 2006 (Cortiella, 2006). This new version maintains the same definition of learning disability as its 1997 counterpart with a significant change, the elimination of the discrepancy requirement between a student's intelligence and academic achievement level (Cortiella, 2006). The legislation allows for school districts to observe how a student responds to scientific, research-based intervention as an indicator of a possible learning disability. In "Response to Intervention," a student who shows signs of learning difficulties is provided with a series of increasingly intensive, individualized instructional or behavioral interventions (Cortiella, 2006). Three levels of intervention, or tiers, in which students receive instruction include (a) Tier 1: a core program based on evidence-based practices; (b) Tier 2: supplementary interventions; and (c) Tier 3: intensive interventions which may lead to special education services (Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, 2006). This multi-tiered approach focuses on earlier intervention for students experiencing difficulty learning to read (James, 2004). Students move between the three tiers depending on the level of intervention needed based on progress monitoring results. Though the participants of

this study were identified as having a learning disability according to the 1997 definition, this change in identification process is notable.

Reading instruction has been the topic of research in education for many years (Adams, 1990; Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985; Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). The Reading First initiative, which is part of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), was written in response to the need for quality reading instruction for all students (including students with learning disabilities) in the United States educational system.

An example of a quality reading program is the Success For All (SFA) reading program, a comprehensive program that includes scientifically researched best practices in reading (Success For All Foundation [SFAF], 2000). Success For All is a school wide reading program that is currently used in many schools across the United States (SFAF, 2000). While it was not originally designed to be used with students with learning disabilities, Success For All is currently being used in some school districts to close the gap in reading for both remedial readers and students with learning disabilities.

Purpose of Study

Based on a review of the current research as discussed in Chapter 2, this dissertation seeks an answer to the question: “Will students with learning disabilities who were provided reading instruction through the Success For All reading program demonstrate higher reading achievement on selected reading assessments (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test and the Qualitative Reading Inventory-3) than the students with learning disabilities who were provided reading instruction through other reading programs?” The Success For All reading program is currently implemented in three elementary schools located in one central Florida school district. These three school sites were selected because they all began implementing the program at the

same time and have participated in on-going training and observation provided by the same Success For All Foundation personnel. This study will focus on these three elementary schools as well as three additional elementary schools with the similar demographic characteristics of race and socioeconomic status in the same district not implementing the Success For All reading program.

The Success For All reading program is a school wide program designed for at-risk populations, but not specifically for students with disabilities. However, in this particular district, the program has been used with both general education students and students with learning disabilities since August 1998 until the present. Remedial readers are defined as students who have been identified as at-risk for learning difficulties and are at least two grade levels behind grade placement. This is a similar definition to students identified with a learning disability as they are also often characterized as having difficulties learning and as performing at least two grade levels below grade placement

Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions will be used for the purpose of this study:

learning disability: The definition of learning disability as it applies to this study was provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997) which states:

“Specific learning disability” means a disorder in one or more basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not apply to children who have learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

In the state of Florida, the diagnostic criteria for learning disabilities as it applies to this study was that the student must: (a) be of average or above average intelligence, (b) demonstrate a discrepancy between intelligence and academic achievement, and (c) demonstrate a discrepancy between intelligence and cognitive processing (Prevatt & Proctor, 2004).

five components of reading: The components of quality reading instruction that the National Reading Panel focused on including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000). A further discussion of these components will be provided in Chapter 2.

remedial readers: students who are reading at least two levels below grade level placement.

Participants

The seventeen participants studied were third grade students with learning disabilities at three central Florida schools implementing the Success For All reading program and three central Florida schools implementing reading programs other than the Success For All reading program. The demographics of the school sites were matched based on socioeconomic status and race as reported by the district office. The equivalency of the three SFA schools to the three Non-SFA schools will later be described in more detail in Chapter 3 due to the fact that the more similar the participants are, the more they are comparable and the more generalizable the results.

Instrumentation

The Reading Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) (FDOE, 2003a) scores for third grade from March 2004 were used to compare reading achievement for all participants.

The Qualitative Reading Inventory-3 (QRI-3) (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001) was administered to the participants to determine each student's instructional reading level. In addition, intelligence quotients (IQs) as measured by the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – III (WISC-III) (Wechsler, 1991) were gathered for all participants. The Reading FCAT and IQ scores were obtained from each school site with permission from the principal as well as parental consent.

Methodology

First, the researcher submitted and defended the research proposal to the previously established committee co-chairs and committee members. Upon committee approval, the proposal was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Central Florida. After IRB approval was granted, the researcher contacted the school principals to identify potential participants and schedule QRI-3 testing. The administration of the QRI-3 assessment was scheduled during the school day between 10:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. during the period of December 3, 2004 to January 28, 2005. Parental consent and child assent were granted before any data were collected. Approximately four tests were given on each testing date based on time and tester fatigue. This schedule allowed time at the end of the testing period for any make-ups to be completed. During the eight week period, the researcher and two independent test administrators each went to one school per testing date and tested a maximum of four participants each. These independent test administrators were trained by the researcher to administer the QRI-3. Specific instructions were provided, and interscorer reliability was .95.

After permission was granted, the researcher contacted each school site to obtain reading FCAT, intelligence quotient (IQ), and school enrollment date for each participant. In addition, the researcher collected information regarding demographics including gender, race,

socioeconomic status (students receiving free or reduced price lunch), participation in a pre-kindergarten program (as reported by parent or guardian) and if the participant was receiving any additional services for English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) or language therapy through the school site.

Data Analysis

A logical analysis of descriptive statistics on all outcomes will be reported in Chapter 4. The analysis will be used to examine all data as determined by the final sample size and the type of data collected from the assessment instruments. Individual participant QRI-3 and FCAT reading scores will be discussed as well as a comparison between groups (SFA and Non-SFA). Participants will be matched and compared based on characteristics that are often associated with reading achievement including gender, race, socioeconomic status (determined by participants who received free/reduced price lunch), participation in a pre-kindergarten program (as reported by parent/guardian), participation in an English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program, participation in language therapy, intelligence quotient (IQ), and years in reading program. The findings of this study and a discussion of results will be provided in Chapter 4.

Assumptions

The following assumptions are made in regards to this study:

1. Based on the requirements of the Success For All Foundation, the schools implementing Success For All provided the same treatment to the participants.
2. All participants at non-SFA schools received the same reading intervention. This assumption was based on personal contact by the researcher with the non-SFA schools.

3. All participants were provided testing accommodations when administered the FCAT as determined by their Individual Education Plan.
4. All schools were providing instruction through research-based programs in the five reading components: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Limitations

The following limitations may or may not restrict the results of this study:

1. Internal validity may be threatened if participants receive different amounts of reading support outside of the Success For All or another general reading program, including but not limited to additional small group instruction and/or individual tutoring provided privately or through the school.
2. Caution in generalizing the results of this study should be restricted to students with learning disabilities who possess similar demographic characteristics to the participants in the study.
3. The schools not implementing the Success For All program may be more or less consistent with instructional delivery as those implementing Success For All.
4. The participants who received instruction through the Success For All program did not participate in the program for the same number of years due to varying enrollment dates, with a range of 4.7 to 0.7 years.
5. The students at the schools implementing Success For All may or may not have the same teacher each nine weeks, based on the program's restructuring and regrouping characteristics.

6. The high mobility rate of our society and some participants included in the study resulted in students leaving their home school or the school district altogether which affected the final sample size of participants.
7. The experience level of the teachers implementing the Success For All or other reading programs was unknown to the researcher.

Significance of the Study

Very little research has been published specifically regarding the program and students with learning disabilities (Denton, Vaughn, & Fletcher, 2003; Slavin, 1996). The results of this study regarding the Success For All reading program will have implications for the exceptional education field because it will add to the research about effective reading instruction methods for use with exceptional education students. In addition, determining the program's impact due to large time and monetary resource commitments is important, as educational funds are limited. Finally, most research to date was conducted by the Success For All Foundation (Hurley, Chamberlain, Slavin, & Madden, 2001; SFAF, 2000). Research conducted outside of the Success For All Foundation has the potential to either add to or detract from the program's credibility as an effective reading program for all students in general and for students with learning disabilities in particular.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to determine if the students with learning disabilities who were provided reading instruction through the Success For All reading program would demonstrate higher achievement on selected reading assessments (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test and the Qualitative Reading Inventory-3) than the students with learning disabilities who were provided reading instruction through other reading programs.

Students with learning disabilities are at a clear disadvantage when it comes to reading, many times reading two or more grade levels below grade placement. One strategy used to provide quality reading instruction to students with learning disabilities is the direct instruction method, which refers to a structured, teacher-directed curriculum program (Olson & Platt, 2000). Success For All is broader in the sense that it is a comprehensive program that includes scientifically-researched best practices in reading (SFAF, 2000). Certainly, the scientifically-researched best practices in reading implemented through the Success For All reading program meet the Florida Reading First initiative as explained in the Reading Program Specifications (FDOE, 2001b).

Furthermore, Success For All is a school wide reading program that is currently used in more than 1,500 schools across the United States (SFAF, 2000). While it was not originally designed to be used with students with learning disabilities, Success For All currently is being used in some school districts to close the gap in reading for both remedial readers as well as students with learning disabilities.

This review of literature seeks first to examine No Child Left Behind and Reading First and the related components to this legislation. Next, the author will discuss components of

reading, factors influencing reading achievement, and reading programs in Florida. Then, a discussion of the current research regarding students with learning disabilities in relationship to reading instruction, the direct instruction of reading, and the Success For All reading program will be provided. Finally, reading assessment instruments and high-stakes testing with students with disabilities will be reviewed.

No Child Left Behind and Reading Instruction

Historically, reading has been the topic of many political policies (Edmondson, 2004). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed in 1965, which initiated Title I and Head Start programs to help children living in low socioeconomic families increase their chances of success in reading. In 1996, President Bill Clinton initiated his plans for the America Reads program, which focused on volunteer reading tutors to help children read independently and on grade level by the end of third grade and later led to the passing of the Reading Excellence Act (1997).

Almost twenty years prior to No Child Left Behind, the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) wrote a report entitled *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983). In this report, the NCEE stated that approximately thirteen percent of all seventeen-year-olds in the United States were considered functionally illiterate. These findings caused school systems to look for ways to improve reading instruction for all students (NCEE, 1983). Fifteen years later, the Center for Education Reform (CER) investigated how the reading abilities of children in the American school systems had changed since the NCEE's 1983 report (CER, 1998). The CER's findings stated that the literacy level of young adults ages fifteen to twenty-one had dropped more than eleven raw points from 1984 to 1992. They also discovered that twenty-five percent

of twelfth graders scored below “basic” in reading on the 1994 National Assessment of Educational Progress (CER, 1998). These reports included information from all students, including gifted students, general education students, and students with disabilities. The Center for Education Reform concluded that not much had changed over the years in the American educational system in regard to reading performance (CER, 1998).

Quality reading instruction has been debated for decades in education. Over the years, various reading proposals have been introduced to help increase the value of reading instruction provided to students in the United States educational system. On January 8, 2002, Congress enacted President George W. Bush’s educational reform initiative that addressed the improvement of reading and literacy entitled No Child Left Behind (2001). The section that addresses specifically the improvement of literacy across the nation is entitled Reading First. The Reading First initiative calls for all students to be able to read at or above grade level by grade three. This initiative also provides states with funds and tools including materials, staff development, and additional support such as tutoring at the school district level. Low-achieving schools are provided support for implementing scientifically research-based reading programs both in the primary grades (kindergarten through grade three) as well as in preschool and Head Start programs.

In response to the continuing national need for more effective reading instruction, Congress asked that researchers, educators, and parents be appointed to a National Reading Panel (NICHHD, 2000) to examine the research on the teaching of reading. This panel of fourteen experts conducted a screening of over 100,000 research studies in the area of reading from 1966 to 1997. Of the 100,000 research studies that were screened, the total number of studies that were actually examined were as follows: 52 independent studies of phonemic

awareness, 38 studies of phonics, 64 studies of guided oral reading, 14 studies of encouraging students to read, 47 studies of vocabulary, and 203 studies of reading comprehension (Shanahan, 2003). As part of this examination, the National Reading Panel only included experimental studies with control groups and gathered their data through analysis, public hearings, and professional organizations to determine the broad main components of reading.

As a result, the National Reading Panel (NRP) concentrated on five main components of quality reading instruction: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Nowhere in the report does the NRP say that these are the only components of quality reading instruction, nor that any one of these five components alone defines reading. However, the NRP and thus, Reading First, insists that all these components must be present as a part of a comprehensive reading instruction delivery model (Shanahan, 2003). These five components remain included in federal and state legislation just as they are a part of the “Just Read, Florida!” initiative, the state of Florida’s response to implementing the Reading First initiative within the No Child Left Behind Act. Every commercial package of literacy materials, professional development, and instructional textbooks that comprise all reading programs rushed to make certain that these five reading components were included and transparent for obvious funding reasons.

The National Reading Panel’s Five Essential Reading Components

One component of quality reading instruction is phonemic awareness. Phonemes are the smallest part of spoken language or smallest unit of sound. Phonemic awareness instruction involves teaching children to focus on blending, segmenting and manipulating phonemes in spoken syllables and words. Phonemic awareness has been identified as the leading indicator of

future reading success (Armstrong, 2003; Clark & Uhry, 1995; Torgeson, 1998). Intensive instruction in phonemic awareness has been found to be effective especially with remedial students (NICHD, 2000). Strong phonemic awareness will help children when they are introduced to phonics. Children must be able to hear and decipher the sounds (phonemic awareness) in order to fully make the connection between written and oral sounds (phonics) (NICHD, 2000). Based on the aforementioned rationale, it would appear that special education teachers should provide direct instruction in phonemic awareness to ensure its delivery (NICHD, 2000).

Another component of quality reading instruction is phonics. Phonics is a teaching approach emphasizing the relationship between symbols and sounds and the blending of these sounds into recognizable words (NICHD, 2000). According to the National Reading Panel's conclusions (NICHD, 2000), phonics instruction can be taught systematically or incidentally for average to above average readers. Systematic synthetic phonics instruction is teaching students explicitly to convert letters into sounds and then blend sounds to form recognizable words. This type of instruction must be provided for students in special education in highly motivating, low teacher to student ratio groups in order for them to successfully sound out and identify words (NICHD, 2000). Mastery of phonics should lead to mastery of a cadre of known words, which in turn will help students read more fluently (NICHD, 2000).

Fluency, another one of the five essential components, is defined as the smooth, accurate reading of text with appropriate expression (NICHD, 2000). Two methods of instruction are discussed throughout the literature that are designed to improve fluency: guided repeated oral reading and silent reading (NICHD, 2000). Guided repeated oral reading provides students with opportunities to read a text aloud repetitively with guidance and feedback from the teacher.

This method has been found to be the most successful in improving the fluency of all readers across grade and ability levels, including special education students (NICHD, 2000). Even though silent reading is beneficial, currently no substantial evidence exists in the research that supports the use of silent reading as a method of improving fluency because of the underlying difficulty of measurement (NICHD, 2000). Fluency might also be considered the connection or bridge between word recognition and text comprehension.

A critical reading component identified by the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) is vocabulary development. According to the National Reading Panel, vocabulary is defined as the knowledge of word meanings (NICHD, 2000). Vocabulary instruction is a part of reading comprehension instruction and can be provided both orally and in print before and during reading. In order for remedial and learning disabled students to master vocabulary, they must be presented with each vocabulary word a minimum of sixteen to twenty-two times (Torgeson, 1998).

Comprehension is the last essential reading component identified by the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000). Text comprehension would seem to be improved by the student's ability to read fluently. Torgeson (1998) states that text comprehension is the most important goal of reading instruction. According to the NRP (NICHD, 2000), all teachers, including those instructing students with learning disabilities, can increase student comprehension skills by providing instruction through cooperative learning peer discussion groups, metacognitive strategies, evaluating the meaning of text, graphic and semantic organizers, asking and answering questions, and summarizing (NICHD, 2000). Students are provided instruction in all of these comprehension skills through the Success For All reading program (SFAF, 2000).

Several criticisms of the No Child Left Behind Act (Lewis, 2002; Manzo & Robelen, 2002; National Education Association, 2003) have been published. The early evidence of the impact of the NCLB Act is that it is undermining many good policies and breeding some bad ones (Lewis, 2002). Individuals in the field of education resent the large focus on state standardized testing, including the narrowing of instruction to only the skills tested as well as the unrealistic expectation that all students learn at the same rate and perform on the same level (Lewis, 2002). This growing criticism of the NCLB Act does not mean that the experts are against the goals of the legislation or of accountability, but instead comes from a realization that current standardized, high-stakes testing narrows the entire educational system and could halt the development of truly significant improvements in teaching and learning (Lewis, 2002).

High-Stakes Testing and Students with Disabilities

The term “high-stakes tests” refers to tests that have high-stakes for individual students, such as grade promotion or high school graduation (Cortiella, 2004). Students with learning disabilities experience limited success in many high-stakes assessment systems (Cortiella, 2004). The risks of high-stakes testing for students with disabilities include grade retention, dropping out, and the awarding of alternative high school diplomas or certificates (Cortiella, 2004). Many special education teachers agree that that the current testing system which takes hours to complete can be damaging to student’s self-esteem and motivation (Meek, 2006; Samuels, 2005). This may be due to the density, difficulty, and duration of such tests (Meek, 2006). However, most research on the consequences of high-stakes testing is anecdotal; there is little empirical evidence on such consequences (Ysseldyke et al., 2004). When students with disabilities participate in standardized assessments with appropriate accommodations, it can

result in raised expectations with improved instruction and educational outcomes, alignment of IEPs to standards and assessments, and improved access to general education (Ysseldyke et al., 2004).

Factors Influencing Reading Achievement

In addition to instruction in the five essential components of reading, individual student characteristics can influence reading achievement. Several factors that have been shown to impact student reading achievement are gender, race, socioeconomic status, participation in a prekindergarten program, second language acquisition, and language deficits. Because of the effects of these factors on reading achievement, further examination of each factor is in order.

Research shows that, on average, girls read better than boys (Swalander & Taube, 2007; Tilley & Callison, 2005). The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) measures the reading comprehension of students in grades 4, 8, and 12 and reports their results as achievement levels (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005). These reading achievement levels are “basic”, “proficient”, and “advanced”, and are set by the National Assessment Governing Board to provide a context for interpreting student performance on the NAEP (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005). In 2005, the NAEP reported that 39% of fourth grade males scored below the “basic” level, with 33% of fourth grade females scoring below the “basic” level (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005).

Race is often a factor that can affect reading achievement. Black and Hispanic children often lag behind their white peers (Haskins, 2004; Miranda, Webb, Brigman, & Poluso, 2007; Roach, 2004). The 2005 NAEP for fourth graders reported that 58% of blacks, 54% of Hispanics, and 52% of American Indian/Alaska Natives were reading below the “basic” level,

compared with 24% of whites and 27% of Asian/Pacific Islanders (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005).

Socioeconomic status has a positive relationship to academic achievement; as one increases, so does the other (Coladarci, 2006; Sirin, 2005; White, 1982). The 2005 NAEP reported that 54% of fourth grade students who were eligible for free/reduced price lunch were reading below the “basic” level, compared with 23% of fourth grade students who were not eligible and 23% of fourth graders with no information available (Perie, Grigg, & Donahue, 2005). The impact of socioeconomic status on reading achievement is likely because parent income and education level can influence the extent to which parents are able to help their children with homework, effectively communicate with teachers, and be an advocate for their children (Vacha & McLaughlin, 1992). Furthermore, the presence of resources such as a quiet place to study and books as well as parent attitudes toward school and expectations for their children can be influenced by parent income and education level (Vacha & McLaughlin, 1992).

Some research shows that children who participate in a prekindergarten program have higher readiness, academic, and communication skills when they enter kindergarten than their peers (Henry, Henderson, Ponder, Gordon, Mashburn, & Rickman, 2003). In a longitudinal study of the effectiveness of prekindergarten programs, one of the major findings of the study was that 82% of 1996-97 prekindergarten students were ready for the third grade when they reached their third year in elementary school (Henry, Gordon, Mashburn, & Ponder, 2001). In a study with different results, researchers analyzed data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study and found that prekindergarten was associated with higher reading and mathematics skills at school entry, but by the spring of first grade the estimated effects on academic skills had largely dissipated (Magnuson, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2007).

Second language learners experience difficulties in basic literacy skills including phonological awareness, syntactic awareness, and verbal memory (Chiappe, Siegel, & Wade-Woolley, 2002). Current research indicates that second language learners develop these reading skills along a similar path as their English native-speaking peers (Gertsten & Geva, 2003). For second language learners, instruction in phonological awareness, decoding, listening and reading comprehension strategies is important (Gersten & Geva, 2003; Geva & Wang, 2001).

Students with language impairments experience difficulties in the areas of phonological, syntax and vocabulary skills (DeThorne et al., 2006). These difficulties may be responsible for their reading deficits. Studies indicate that students with language impairments are at risk for later reading disabilities because reading depends upon a wide variety of underlying language skills, including grammar and syntax, semantics, and phonological skills (Spear-Swerling, 2006).

Based on the previously reviewed research, it is evident that there are many factors that influence student reading achievement. These factors include gender, race, socioeconomic status, participation in a prekindergarten program, second language acquisition, and language deficits. When conducting research on the effects of a reading program, it is important to consider these factors in relation to individual student reading performance.

Reading Programs in Florida

Regardless of individual characteristics and impacting factors, all students need quality instruction through effective reading programs. On September 7, 2001, by Executive Order Number 01-260, Governor Jeb Bush asked the Florida Department of Education to make recommendations for reading programs. In response to this Executive Order, the department developed a set of specifications for local reading programs in coordination with numerous

Florida stakeholders entitled Reading Program Specifications (RPS), (FDOE, 2001b). This document provides a comprehensive conceptual framework for all Florida educators as a blueprint for developing effective reading programs. As such, the RPS (FDOE, 2001b) specifies that these reading programs must support high quality reading instruction, as defined by the National Reading Panel (2000) with the aforementioned five essential reading components, so that all Florida students can meet Sunshine State Standards. A variety of reading resources and instructional practices must be in place that are grounded in scientifically-based reading research. The plan must be comprehensive, well-organized, and provide opportunities for all students to learn to read. Consequently, no one commercial program has been selected by the state of Florida to meet the reading instruction needs of all students (FDOE, 2001b).

High quality reading programs were defined by the Florida Department of Education in their Reading Program Specifications (FDOE, 2001b) as possessing comprehensive initial professional development for everyone. This professional development should be lead by school-site experts often called “Reading Coaches” and must be frequent and continuous in order to impact change.

According to their Reading Program Specifications (FDOE, 2001b), an effective reading program is sustained through the practices of the school and district administrators that support high quality reading instruction. Administrators must hold reading as a school wide priority and ensure that inservice and evaluation processes focus on reading. School resources should be focused on increasing reading achievement throughout the school year for all students. High quality reading instruction is a dynamic system that increases students’ learning of the five essential reading components, efficiently uses instructional time, contains a systematic set of assessment methods, and provides for differentiated instruction.

An effective reading program maintains a print-rich environment with an ample supply of quality and up-to-date text materials and resources that are aligned with student reading levels. These comprehensive instructional materials must include a wide assortment of diverse text, provide for the flexible use of text, and include the appropriate use of technology (FDOE, 2001b).

Students with Learning Disabilities and Reading Instruction

Currently, several prevention and early intervention reading programs, materials and resources are being utilized in an effort to keep children from ever needing special education services for learning disabilities (Slavin, 1996). Though not originally designed for use with students with learning disabilities, one such program is Reading Recovery (Clay, 1985) which is a daily 30-minute, one-on-one tutoring program for at-risk first graders provided by a certified Reading Recovery teacher. Another program is entitled Prevention of Learning Disabilities (Silver, A. A. & Hagin, 1990), which provides early intervention through one-on-one tutoring and focuses on both general perceptual skills as well as reading. The Success For All program is also considered preventative for students who need special education services for learning disabilities in that it provides intensive professional development, a full-time building facilitator, curriculum-based assessment, strong parent involvement, and one-on-one tutoring for struggling first graders provided by a certified teacher or instructional assistant (Slavin, 1996).

However, according to a study by Denton, Vaughn, and Fletcher (2003), students at risk for reading problems need more than programs, materials, and resources. These researchers (2003) state that the following areas must be addressed in order to enhance the reading development of all students, especially students with learning disabilities: (a) an effective and knowledgeable teacher, (b) integration of key instructional components, (c) differentiated

instruction for students with reading difficulties, (d) explicitness of instruction, and (e) bridging of the gap between research and practice. Further, the success of programs for students with learning disabilities has been found to be highly related to the extent to which the general education teacher has the time, skills, knowledge, and interest in providing an appropriate education for students with learning disabilities. Another related factor is the extent to which the special education teacher is able to control their schedule and case load so that they are able to provide explicit and systematic instruction each day to a small group of students with learning disabilities. If either of these two factors is not in place, reading gains for students with learning disabilities is not likely (Denton, Vaughn, & Fletcher, 2003).

Often students do not qualify for special education services because they do not meet the necessary discrepancy between ability and achievement criteria. However, it is noted that there is not a significant degree of difference either psychometrically or clinically between students identified as learning disabled and students who are considered remedial (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 2000). The age at which a student is identified as having a learning disability influences the student's ability to close the gap between achievement and intelligence levels. Studies have shown that when students with a severe reading problem receive early, intensive instructional intervention, 95% can perform at the national reading average level (Council for Exceptional Children, 1997).

A system for providing early, intensive individualized instructional intervention for students experiencing difficulties in reading is "Response to Intervention" (Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, 2006; Cortiella, 2006; Hilton, 2007; James, 2004). Students move between three levels, or tiers, based on frequent progress monitoring and data analysis results. Tier One consists of a core program based on research-based best practices

implemented by the classroom teacher. Students that do not respond to the interventions in Tier One move to Tier Two, in which students receive additional academic supports beyond what was provided in Tier One. The interventions are often provided in a small group setting through a scripted or very structured program (Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, 2006). In Tier Three, students receive intensive instruction through one or more specific, evidence-based interventions. If the student fails to demonstrate significantly improved academic skills despite individual, intensive interventions, this failure to “respond to intervention” may indicate evidence of a learning disability and lead to special education services (Hilton, 2007).

Two of the most prominent research-based core reading programs for the general population that have been successfully disseminated include Reading Recovery and Success For All. Of course, variables that influence the sustained high-quality implementation of any reading program include administrator and teacher buy-in, strong support for teachers, and continuous professional development that leads to practice mastery (Denton, Vaughn, & Fletcher, 2003).

As evidenced by the previous discussion, many reading programs and instructional methods can be utilized with students with learning disabilities. One instructional method that crosses all disciplines and has not been discussed, but is commonly used with this population of students, is direct instruction (Engelmann & Brunner, 1974; Kuder, 1991; Polloway, Epstein, Polloway, Patton, & Ball, 1986). Due to this method’s popularity in teaching students with learning disabilities, a more detailed examination of the method is in order.

Direct Instruction as a Reading Instruction Method for Students with a Learning Disability

A general instructional method often used to teach students with learning disabilities how to read is the direct instruction method, which refers to a structured, teacher-directed curriculum program. Direct instruction is defined more specifically by Kuder (1991) as students who are taught in small groups (five to seven students), usually for approximately 30-minute periods, five days per week. The direct instruction program manual specifies the sequence of presentation as well as providing a script of statements and hand signals for use by the teacher. Two well-known direct instruction programs specific to reading are Corrective Reading (Polloway, Epstein, Polloway, Patton, & Ball, 1986) and DISTAR (Engelmann & Brunner, 1974).

One study conducted regarding direct instruction reading programs used with students with learning disabilities was conducted by Kuder (1991). The study investigated students with learning disabilities whom received reading instruction through the DISTAR direct instruction reading program. The reading progress of twenty-six students was measured over two years. The results indicated that syntactic ability was related to improvement in comprehension skills and that phonological ability was related to progress in word attack skills. These results have implications for students with learning disabilities in that the oral language abilities of students with learning disabilities should be considered when selecting an appropriate reading program.

Research data supports the idea of “one size does not fit all” (Marston, Deno, Kim, Diment, & Rogers, 1995; Valencia & Buly, 2004). A comparison study of six research-based teaching strategies was conducted that produced inconsistent results within the parameters of the study (Marston et al., 1995). The reading instruction approaches included peer tutoring, reciprocal teaching, effective teaching principles, computer-aided instruction, and two direct instruction models. Peer tutoring is an instructional strategy in which students work on academic

tasks in pairs, with one student acting as the teacher while the other student is the learner.

Reciprocal teaching is a cognitive approach to teaching reading to elementary school students in order to develop the cognitive and metacognitive skills required for the comprehension of text. The students lead a dialogue structured around the use of four strategies that include summarizing, question generating, clarifying, and predicting. Effective teaching principles emphasized time on task, clear presentation of materials, corrective feedback, guided practice, and monitoring of student progress. The computer-assisted instruction included instruction in decoding, sight word recognition, and text comprehension. Teachers controlled the selection of words, allocation of time, pacing of tasks, and creation of comprehension questions. The two direct instruction models included: (a) Science Research Associates (SRA) materials such as “Corrective Reading” and (b) direct instruction principles applied to the district basal series. The researchers concluded from their research results that computer-assisted instruction, direct instruction methods with a basal reading series, and a reciprocal teaching approach produced significant improvements in reading achievement (Marston et al., 1995).

A meta-analysis of reading research intervention outcomes for students with learning disabilities was conducted by Swanson (1999). In this synthesis, Swanson analyzed intervention research for students with learning disabilities that included word recognition and reading comprehension measures. Studies that were included in the analysis tested one of the following instructional models: (a) direct instruction alone, (b) strategy instruction alone, (c) direct instruction and strategy instruction combined, or (d) neither direct instruction or strategy instruction. The research synthesis showed that direct instruction alone was a robust instructional model for word recognition measures while the combined direct instruction-strategy instruction model was strong in increasing reading comprehension for students with learning

disabilities. The author does note that the differences in IQ did influence how well a particular instructional model improved reading achievement.

According to Foorman, Fletcher, and Francis (2001), several issues in regard to poor readers need to be considered when providing reading instruction in order to ensure student success. Reading problems occur primarily at the single word level, both in isolation and in context (Foorman, Fletcher, & Francis, 1997). Students that experience decoding problems often have problems segmenting words and syllables into phonemes. Good reading and poor reading both occur as part of a natural continuum of ability. According to Foorman, Fletcher, and Francis (2001), at least 10 million children in the United States are poor readers. Reading problems occur in boys and girls equally, but the fact that schools identify four times more boys than girls is likely based on underlying behavior instead of only learning characteristics (Foorman, Fletcher, & Francis, 1997). Multiple causes of poor reading include neurological, familial, social disadvantage/cultural, and instructional factors. Foorman, Fletcher, and Francis (2001) report that direct instruction in decoding skills results in more favorable outcomes than does a context-emphasis or embedded approach. They also state that the direct instruction program must be structured and explicit while focusing on intensity, duration, and teacher training/monitoring.

The Success For All Reading Program

Though a comprehensive program using best practices in reading instruction, the Success For All reading program implements direct instruction methods as a large part of their instructional delivery. The Success For All program was developed by Robert E. Slavin, Nancy A. Madden, and their colleagues (SFAF, 2000) at Johns Hopkins University and was launched in 1987 at a Baltimore inner-city elementary school. Success For All gradually expanded, and in

the 1999-2000 school year, Success For All was used in more than 1,500 schools in 48 states, serving over 800,000 students from Alaska to Florida (SFAF, 2000). Success For All is an example of a comprehensive, research-based approach designed to restructure elementary schools and ensure “success for all” students. Currently, the Success For All Foundation has aligned their reading program with the Reading First initiative in order to address the five components of quality reading instruction (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension), and the program is one of the scientifically research-based programs that meets the Florida Reading First initiative as explained in the Reading Program Specifications (FDOE, 2001b).

Therefore, in alignment with NCLB and Reading First, the program’s main goal is for students to be reading by grade three with a special focus on low-achieving schools. All students in grades first through fifth are regrouped as determined by their Success For All *Roots* Assessment (first grade reading level) or Scholastic Reading Inventory scores (second grade reading level and above). These newly-formed groups are then assigned to smaller classes at their instructional level for an uninterrupted 90-minute block each day. Within these ability-based classes, students are then further grouped in heterogeneous, random cooperative learning teams where they are taught and reinforced to exhibit cooperative learning standards such as active listening and encouraging others, emphasizing individual accountability and group success. These cooperative learning teams help ensure the success of each student team member in learning how to apply the five reading components to various genres of reading texts (SFAF, 2000).

The Success For All reading program consists of three different components: *KinderRoots* for kindergarten students, *Roots* for students reading on the first grade level, and

Wings for students reading on the second grade level or above. Through the *KinderRoots* component, students are provided numerous opportunities to build oral language, phonemic awareness and phonic skills. In *Roots*, students are provided direct instruction in phonic skills, fluency, and monitoring for meaning (comprehension). In the *Wings* component, students are provided direct instruction in vocabulary and comprehension skills. Each eight weeks, students are assessed utilizing the Success For All *Roots* Assessment (first grade reading level) or Scholastic Reading Inventory (second grade reading level and above) to determine if they need tutoring services or are ready to accelerate beyond their current placement in a graded reading level.

In addition to providing systematic instruction in the five components of reading, the Success For All program emphasizes early intervention and prevention tactics to proactively avoid possible roadblocks to learning to read. In addition to the 90-minute block, a state-certified teacher tutor and SFA-trained instructional assistants are provided to work one-on-one with struggling first graders to ensure that they do not fall behind during this critical reading development time. Extensive, on-going professional development is provided to all Success For All teachers throughout the course of the school year, which includes three full days of training before the school year begins and several refresher workshops during the year. A full-time, state-certified teacher (someone who was already an experienced teacher at the school) acts as a facilitator who proactively provides observations and feedback, and who is continuously available to help teachers improve their instruction and increase the reading gains of their students.

Adopting Success For All requires a strong commitment both from the faculty as well as the school budget. District and school staff must review program materials and visit nearby

Success For All schools. Schools must go through an application process to be Success For All schools. Finally, a vote by secret ballot of at least 80% of the entire teaching staff is required to initiate the program. Funding requirements depend on the size and location of the individual school. Example costs for a school of 500 students ranges from \$119,000 to \$130,00 for three years of training, both consumable and permanent materials, and follow-up visits by Success For All Foundation personnel (SFAF, 2000). Success For All requires a commitment of time, energy, and money from all individuals involved in its implementation. However, the Success For All Foundation at Johns Hopkins University states the results are well worth the costs (SFAF, 2000).

Hurley, Chamberlain, Slavin, and Madden (2001) conducted a study of the effectiveness of the Success For All reading program in Texas schools. These researchers looked at the scores for all students on the 1998 Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). They compared the scores of students at every school that began implementing Success For All anytime from 1994 to 1997 with the scores of students from all the other schools in Texas. They found that, after four years in Success For All, those students participating in the program did significantly better on the TAAS than the other students in the state. On average, the Success For All schools gained 5.85 percentage points more than the non-SFA schools in the state. The improvements were evident when they compared all the students as a whole group, as well as the disaggregated comparisons of the African American, Hispanic and Caucasian student subgroups. Regardless of how they divided the students into particular ethnic groups, the students that attended SFA schools did significantly better on the TAAS than students in non-SFA schools (Hurley, Chamberlain, Slavin, & Madden, 2001).

The Comprehensive School Reform Quality (CSRQ) Center (2005) is an independent organization funded by the U. S. Department of Education that provides tools and assistance to educators in choosing high quality comprehensive school reform programs to meet local needs. This organization reviewed 115 quantitative studies for effects of Success For All on student achievement (CSRQ, 2005). Of the 115 studies, 31 met the CSRQ Center standards for rigor of research design with results earning the Center's confidence in the conclusive findings. Of these studies, eleven reported consistent positive effects of Success For All on student achievement, twelve demonstrated no significant effects, and eight reported a combination of positive effects and no significant results (CSRQ, 2005). The CSRQ Center concluded that the overall evidence from a review of quantitative studies suggested that Success For All has a positive impact on student achievement some of the time (CSRQ, 2005).

However, the Success For All reading program is not without critics. In response to Bush's push to spend \$5 billion on federal literacy programs, Michelle Malkin (2001) states "Success for All is a classic lesson in fiscal irresponsibility and educational malpractice". She writes that data showing success of the program have been misrepresented because the program's founder, Robert E. Slavin, and his colleagues have conducted almost all of the research done on the program's results. Additionally, several critical reviews of the Success For All program report that many of the claims of improved reading scores come from scientifically invalid research conducted by researchers tied to Slavin (Lubove, 2000; Pogrow, 2002).

In response to the previously discussed article by Hurley, Chamberlain, Slavin, and Madden (2001) and the TAAS scores, Stanley Pogrow (2002) has tracked the claims of actual successes of Success For All. His interest stems from his concern regarding the powerful influence that the Success For All reading program has exerted over many different aspects of

the profession including government policy studies that have led to the withdrawal of specialized help for the disadvantaged in favor of school wide reform models (Pogrow, 2002).

In the most recent effort to demonstrate the achievements of the Success For All reading program, Eric Hurley and Anne Chamberlain, two employees of the Success For All Foundation (SFAF), joined Slavin and Madden in the June 2001 *Kappan* to claim that Success For All reduced learning gaps on the TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills) by specifically helping African American and Hispanic students. According to Pogrow (2002), such a claim is difficult to believe, given the consistent failure of the program in U. S. schools with very high percentages of African American and Hispanic students.

According to Pogrow (2002), the gains in the TAAS scores were clearly the result of an immense test-prep effort. In order to make a case that Success For All had some special effect within the overall TAAS gap-reduction process, Hurley and his colleagues were obliged, according to Pogrow (2002), to show that Success For All schools were producing better results than comparable schools doing equal amounts of test-prep activities. However, instead of making comparisons to similar schools, the Success For All Foundation (SFAF) study compared the performance of minorities in select Success For All schools to the state as a whole (Pogrow, 2002). The problem with comparing the performance of minorities in the SFA schools to the whole state was that the samples were clearly different in many respects, including but not limited to poverty levels. In addition, changes such as within the samples themselves were documented over the course of the study (1994 to 1998). These changes affected the comparability within each sample as well as between them. In 1998 the TASS test became more inclusive, which was when this SFAF study ended (Pogrow, 2002). Also, the SFAF study did not mention that a Spanish version of the TAAS was started in 1997 which was a dramatic

change in testing that took place during the years of the study. The SFAF study's overall state data did not include the results from the Spanish TAAS (Pogrow, 2002).

Success For All and Students with Learning Disabilities

According to Slavin (1996), schools generally provided adequate reading programs in the elementary grades, but they know with certainty that a number of children will not learn to read. In particular, a percentage of children will fail to learn to read and will very likely be retained, assigned to long-term remedial services, or be labeled as having specific learning disabilities and provided with special education services. Slavin (1996) calls this "neverstreaming": implementing prevention and early intervention programs powerful enough to ensure that virtually every child is successful in the first place. Avoiding both special education and mainstreaming is a residual goal of Success For All.

According to Slavin (1996), evidence has increased regarding methods to ensure the success of almost all children in the early elementary grades in reading. Slavin (1996) cited Success For All, Reading Recovery (Clay, 1985), and Prevention of Learning Disabilities (Silver, A. A. & Hagin, 1990) as quality preventative reading programs. He stated that if all children in need of early intervention participated in multiple simultaneous programs as intensive and comprehensive as these three, from preschool through the elementary grades, the number of children still having reading problems would almost certainly be a fraction of what is today. He advocated the need to focus on prevention and early intervention instead of later remediation and subsequent special education services.

Due to the scarcity of research studies on the effects of the Success For All reading program for students with learning disabilities, this review is limited. In a randomized

experiment of 35 schools with more than 16,000 students, Borman and Hewes (2002) studied the long-term effects of the Success For All reading program. In this study, Borman & Hewes (2002) found that students with special needs who received reading instruction through the Success For All program were spending fewer years (0.55) than control students (0.82) in special education classes during elementary school. In addition, middle school students with special needs who participated in Success For All spent less time (0.49 years) enrolled in special education classes than the control students (0.70 years) (Borman & Hewes, 2002). They concluded that these results indicate that the Success For All program prevents the need for special education services (Borman & Hewes, 2002).

Reading Assessment Instruments

In order to accurately measure the quantitative effects of a reading program on student reading achievement, the researcher must utilize a reading assessment instrument that meets specific criteria. Reading assessment instruments that are used to inform instruction should demonstrate reliability and construct validity as well as include an evaluation of specific skills that are amenable to intervention (Rouse & Fantuzzo, 2006). In this study, the researcher chose two reading assessment instruments: the Reading Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) (FDOE, 2003a) and the Qualitative Reading Inventory-3 (QRI-3) (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001).

The reading subtest of the FCAT was chosen as an assessment instrument because the FCAT has been designed to assess student mastery of the Sunshine State Standards in reading (FDOE, 2002). The subtests of the FCAT are Words and phrases, Main idea and author's purpose, Comparisons, and Reference and research. The validity and reliability of scores

obtained from the FCAT assessment piece are ensured by the State of Florida through rigorous field testing (FDOE, 2002). The FCAT technical report published by the FDOE (2002) states that Cronbach's alpha reliability estimates range between .86 and .88 for reading. The content validity of the 2004 FCAT has been demonstrated in Table 1 through a table of specifications in which the researcher described the reading intervention program objectives, the Sunshine State Standards, and the objectives assessed by the FCAT. Strength of the content validity is assured by a precise set of definitions and controlling specifications, development by the Department of Education with the assistance of commercial testing companies, and validation by committees of practicing Florida classroom teachers and curriculum specialists (FDOE, 2001a).

Unlike the group reading FCAT, the QRI-3 is an individual test that actually allows the test administrator to observe and listen to the reading skills of the participant. The QRI-3 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001) determines a student's instructional reading level. The subtests of the QRI-3 are Word recognition, Oral reading with comprehension, and Silent reading with comprehension.

In the QRI-3 manual (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001), the reliability is reported and established through internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha reliability estimates were .99 for total miscues, .98 for explicit comprehension, and .98 for implicit comprehension, with a standard error of measurement ranging from .10 to .18), alternate-form reliability (all above .80), and an interscorer reliability of .98. Validity is ensured through criterion-related validity and validity of classification (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001). Further, the content validity of the QRI-3 has been demonstrated in Table 1 through a table of specifications describing the reading intervention program objectives, the Sunshine State Standards, and the objectives assessed by the QRI-3.

The content validity of the reading FCAT and QRI-3 is important to consider when comparing participant scores on the two assessment instruments. In order for these assessment scores to be comparable, they must test the same content.

Table 1
Content Validity of Reading Assessments QRI-3 and FCAT

Essential Reading Components (NICHHD, 2000)	Sunshine State Standards (Grade 3)	QRI-3	FCAT
phonemic awareness	X	X	
phonics	X	X	
fluency	X	X	
vocabulary	X	X	X
comprehension	X	X	X

Summary

In summary, the Reading First initiative, part of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), calls for all students to be able to read at or above grade level by grade three. In response to the need for effective reading instruction, the National Reading Panel concentrated on five essential reading components: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (NICHHD, 2000). When providing reading instruction, several factors influencing reading achievement including gender, race, socioeconomic status, participation in a prekindergarten program, second language acquisition, and language deficits should be considered.

All students need quality reading instruction through evidenced-based reading programs. One effective instructional method for use with students with learning disabilities is direct

instruction. Success For All is a research-based program that incorporates best practices in reading instruction, including direct instruction.

High-stakes standardized testing can be detrimental for students with learning disabilities unless appropriate accommodations are provided. In order to accurately measure the quantitative effects of a reading program on student reading achievement, the researcher must utilize a reading assessment instrument that is reliable and valid. In this study, the researcher chose two reading assessment instruments: the Reading Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) (FDOE, 2003a) and the Qualitative Reading Inventory-3 (QRI-3) (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001).

In the coming chapters, the methods and procedures of this study will be described including participants, setting, instrumentation, and data collection procedures. In addition, the data will be analyzed with a discussion of the findings and implications. Finally, conclusions and recommendations for future study will be provided.

CHAPTER 3 METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methods and procedures utilized in this study by describing the participants and setting as well as the method and procedure for collecting data. The original study was to be a prospective causal-comparative study to examine a possible cause-effect relationship between Success For All reading instruction and reading achievement.

The study was carried out in six schools located in one Florida school district. Three schools implemented the SFA reading program and three implemented other evidenced-based reading programs. The seventeen participants studied were in third grade and receiving exceptional education services for a learning disability.

After appropriate permission was obtained, the researcher collected information on all participants including demographic characteristics, factors influencing reading achievement (as discussed in Chapter 2), IQ scores, and FCAT reading scores. Then, the QRI-3 reading assessment was administered to each participant.

Due to missing data, the researcher was unable to complete the original proposed research design. Rather, a logical analysis was conducted of the existing data through descriptive statistics, tables, and graphs. As planned, this evidence will be used to answer the question: Will students with learning disabilities who were provided reading instruction through the Success For All reading program demonstrate higher reading achievement on selected reading assessments (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test and the Qualitative Reading

Inventory-3) than the students with learning disabilities who were provided reading instruction through other reading programs?

Participants and Setting

The Success For All reading program is currently implemented in only three elementary schools located in one central Florida school district. The Success For All reading program is a school wide program designed for at-risk populations, but not specifically for students with disabilities. However, in this particular district, the program has been used with both general education students and students with learning disabilities from July 1998 until the present. Though the Success For All program is currently implemented in fifteen elementary schools across the state of Florida, the three school sites in this study were selected because they all began implementing the program at the same time. In addition, staff in the respective three schools have participated in on-going training and observation provided by the same Success For All personnel. This study focused on these three elementary schools as well as three additional elementary schools in the same district not implementing the Success For All reading program.

Based on information provided by the district office, each of the three Non-SFA schools were individually matched (as shown in Figure 1) with an SFA school due to their similarity in respect to the demographic characteristics of race (percentage of minority students) and socioeconomic status (percentage of students receiving free/reduced price lunch). The schools were matched by the researcher because the more alike they are, the more comparable the data and the more generalizable the results.

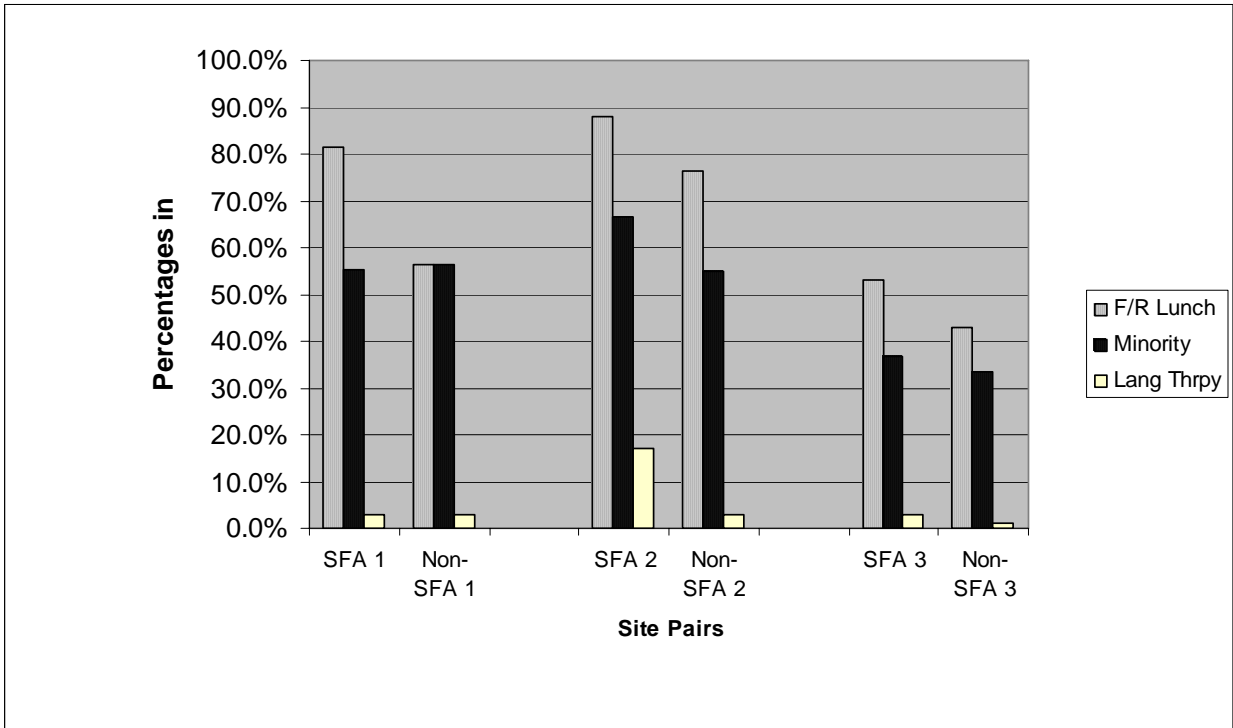


Figure 1. Matched Site Pairs

First, the researcher collected data on the demographic characteristics of race (percentage of minority students) and socioeconomic status (percentage of students receiving free/reduced price lunch) for each of the six schools for the school year 2005 (McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc., 2006). The 2005 data was collected because it was the most current information available at the time to the researcher. Then, data on the percentage of students receiving language therapy at each of the six schools was collected from the district office (K. Durnford, personal communication, July 17, 2007). Non-SFA sites were then paired with the SFA site that was the most similar in regard to race and socioeconomic status. Each of the SFA sites has a higher percentage of minority students and students receiving free/reduced price lunch than their Non-SFA counterpart.

The target population of this study was comprised of third grade students with learning disabilities from the six selected schools. Students in third grade are the focus of this study because of the mandatory retention laws pertaining to this grade level and the No Child Left Behind (2001) mandates. The researcher's original minimum sample size goal was 30 in each group, with 60 total participants. The researcher chose the sample based on experience and knowledge of the group to be sampled. Participants had to meet the following criteria to be included in the study: (a) placement in third grade during the 2003-2004 school year, (b) receiving exceptional education services for a learning disability, and (c) attending one of the six schools in the accessible population.

The participants were accessed through permission from the district office (Appendix B), signed parent consent (Appendix C) and child assent (Appendix D) forms as well as approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Central Florida (Appendix A). In the original research proposal, 60 participants were to be included in this study based on information provided by the district office. After permission to proceed was granted by the district office, the six school principals reported an actual total number of potential participants as 48 students. Of these 48, one individual was not in the target grade level, six individuals were provided services as Other Health Impaired (not learning disabled), ten withdrew from their school site, and twelve did not respond to repeated permission requests.

The factors contributing to this significant decline in potential participants included but were not limited to a high mobility rate among the participants included in the study resulting in students leaving their home school or the school district altogether as well as misinformation from and miscommunication between the researcher and the school sites in regard to participant criteria. Of the nineteen potential participants remaining, one did not have FCAT scores for

2004 and one withdrew from the school during the QRI-3 administration window. This resulted in an attrition rate of 65% (31 of 48). The seventeen participants studied were already assigned to classes and these classes were already established at each school site before the research began.

Instrumentation

The Reading Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) (FDOE, 2003a) scores for third grade from March 2004 were used to compare reading achievement for all participants. The FCAT test was chosen as an assessment instrument because the FCAT has been designed to assess student mastery of the Sunshine State Standards (FDOE, 2003b). In addition, the FCAT scores are used by the state of Florida to make high-stakes decisions regarding schools and students including school grades and student promotion/retention. Finally, the FCAT was chosen due to the fact that most of the research previously cited on the Success For All reading program has compared state test scores, such as the TAAS in Texas (Hurley, Chamberlain, Slavin, & Madden, 2001).

The validity and reliability of scores obtained from the FCAT assessment piece are ensured by the State of Florida through rigorous field testing (FDOE, 2003b). The content validity of the 2004 FCAT was presented in Table 1, a table of specifications describing the reading intervention program objectives, the Sunshine State Standards, and the objectives assessed by the FCAT.

The FCAT reading test results are reported individually for each student by the Florida Department of Education as an achievement level on a scale of level 1 to level 5. These achievement levels are categorical in nature. Students are either considered working below

grade level (levels 1 and 2), on grade level (level 3) or above grade level (levels 4 and 5).

Though other scores including standard scores and a breakdown of specific content area scores are reported, the achievement level for reading is the only one considered in this study. This is because the achievement level is the only score used in making high-stakes decisions.

In addition to the reading FCAT, the Qualitative Reading Inventory-3 (QRI-3) (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001) was administered to determine the student's instructional reading level. The scores obtained from this assessment instrument were used to compare reading achievement for all participants with their reading FCAT scores. The subtests of the QRI-3 are word identification in isolation (word lists), word identification in context (fluency of oral reading passage), narrative passage comprehension, and expository passage comprehension.

In the QRI-3 manual, the reliability and validity are reported and established through internal consistency reliability, alternate-form reliability, interscorer reliability, criterion-related validity and validity of classification (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001). The content validity of the QRI-3 was presented in Table 1, a table of specifications describing the reading intervention program objectives, the Sunshine State Standards, and the objectives assessed by the QRI-3. It is assumed that the QRI-3 will highlight a wider range of ability as well as a more specific criterion-referenced perspective than the FCAT. Also, because the participants have learning disabilities, the QRI-3 was used to detect possible differences or gains that are not possible because of floor effects using the FCAT.

The QRI-3 assesses the instructional level of an individual according to word lists, fluency timings (words read per minute), and oral comprehension questions of both narrative and expository passages (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001). The fluency score is coupled with the word list level to determine which beginning narrative passage to present to the individual, but does not

correspond to a specific reading level on its own. Therefore, only word lists, narrative passage comprehension, and expository passage comprehension will be considered in this analysis. Of these three scores, the narrative passage comprehension should more highly correlate with the FCAT reading score because they were both designed to assess an individual's reading comprehension as shown in Table 1 (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001). Though the narrative passage comprehension is intended to be the most representative of an individual's instructional reading level, all scores should of course be considered when making instructional decisions for an individual student.

Procedure

On January 23, 2004, permission to conduct research was granted by the district office. Upon approval by the dissertation committee, the proposal was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Central Florida. After IRB approval was granted on May 16, 2004, the researcher contacted the school principals to obtain principal permission, identify potential participants, and schedule the QRI-3 testing. Principal permission for each of the six school sites was granted between May 16 - May 20, 2004 with potential participant names, home addresses, and phone numbers provided by school personnel between May 20 - June 7, 2004. Parent consent forms were mailed with a return researcher-addressed and stamped envelope to the potential participant home addresses on June 7, 2004.

A second mailing was sent on July 20, 2004 to individuals who did not respond to the first letter. The researcher contacted each teacher of students with learning disabilities on August 16, 2004 to enlist their support in obtaining signed parent consent forms. At this time, six potential participants were excluded from the sample due to students being classified as Other

Health Impaired rather than Specific Learning Disabled. Subsequent letters were sent home by the school-based teachers via student backpack on August 30, 2004, November 15, 2004, and January 6, 2005. The final number of parent consent form responses was 36 out of the original 48 potential participants, or a 75% response rate. Therefore, parent consent and child assent were granted before any data were collected.

The number of tests administered each day was limited to four per day to reduce tester fatigue. Each test session lasted 45-60 minutes. The administration of the QRI-3 assessment was scheduled during the school day between 10:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. during the period of December 3, 2004 to January 28, 2005. This schedule allowed time at the end of the testing period for any make-ups to be completed, but none were eventually needed. During the eight week period, the researcher and two voluntary, independent test administrators went to one school per testing date and tested a maximum of four participants.

The independent test administrators were trained by the researcher to administer each of the QRI-3 subtests, including word lists, oral reading fluency, narrative passage comprehension, and expository passage comprehension. Each training session consisted of all test administrators, including the researcher, reading and discussing the QRI-3 assessment manual as well as practicing the assessment administration and scoring. Five of the seventeen final participants were tested by the researcher and the two test administrators. Of the 60 subtest scores resulting from these five participants (5 participants x 4 subtests x 3 test administrators), 57 subtest outcomes were the same, resulting in an interscorer reliability of .95 (57 out of 60).

During the period of December 3, 2004 to January 28, 2005, the researcher obtained Reading FCAT scores, intelligence quotients (IQs) as measured by the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children – III (WISC-III) (Wechsler, 1991), and number of years in the Success For All reading program based on school enrollment date for each participant at his/her respective school. In order to determine the possible extent of personal factors on students' reading

achievement, the researcher gathered gender, race, socioeconomic status (students receiving free/reduced price lunch), participation in a pre-kindergarten program (as reported by parent/guardian), and if the participant were receiving any additional services for English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and/or language therapy for each participant. This additional information was collected due to the impact of each of these variables on reading achievement.

Table 2 includes information on the aforementioned variables as linked to each of the 17 participants. Participants beginning with “S” participated in the SFA reading program, those beginning with “NS” participated in the non-SFA reading program. A quick look down the columns reveal the gender, race, socioeconomic status (free/reduced price lunch), pre-kindergarten, ESOL, language therapy, IQ, and years in the SFA program for each participant. The race category labels are: B = Black, H = Hispanic, M = Multiracial, W = White. One dash indicates that data was unavailable. Two dashes indicate that the information does not apply.

Table 2
Variables Affecting Reading Achievement

Participants	Variables							
	Gender	Race	F/R Lunch	PreK	ESOL	Lang Thrpy	IQ	Years in SFA
S1	M	H	Y	Y	Y	N	-	0.7
S2	M	W	Y	N	N	N	90	0.3
S3	F	W	Y	Y	N	Y	90	1.7
S4	M	M	Y	N	N	N	88	4.7
S5	F	W	Y	N	N	N	113	3.7
S6	M	H	Y	Y	Y	N	103	3.7
S7	M	W	Y	Y	N	N	100	4.7
S8	M	W	N	Y	N	N	96	0.2
S9	M	W	N	Y	N	Y	95	4.7
S10	F	W	N	Y	N	Y	92	4.7
S11	F	W	N	N	N	Y	94	4.7
S12	F	H	Y	Y	Y	Y	98	2.2
S13	M	W	N	N	N	Y	106	0.7
NS1	M	W	Y	N	N	N	122	--
NS2	M	H	Y	N	Y	Y	83	--
NS3	M	W	N	N	N	N	94	--
NS4	F	B	N	N	N	N	81	--

Patterns in the Population

The SFA and Non-SFA groups were similar in respect to gender, participation in an ESOL program, and IQ scores. As indicated in Table 2, both the SFA and Non-SFA groups had more males than females. All of the Hispanic participants in both groups participated in an ESOL program. The majority of the participants in both groups had an average IQ score, between 90 – 110. This was to be expected, as students with learning disabilities are generally of average or above average intelligence by definition.

The SFA group had more minority individuals than non-minority individuals, more participants receiving free/reduced price lunch than not, and more individuals who participated in a pre-kindergarten program. Six of the participants in the SFA group received language therapy. In addition, seven out of the thirteen SFA participants were enrolled at their school site since kindergarten. Of these seven, five were retained in one grade.

The Non-SFA group had an equal number of minority/non-minority individuals, an equal number of participants receiving and not receiving free/reduced price lunch, and no individuals who participated in a pre-kindergarten program. One participant in the Non-SFA group received language therapy.

The seventeen participants studied were third grade students with learning disabilities at three SFA and three Non-SFA schools in one central Florida school district. The researcher collected data on each participant including reading FCAT scores, QRI-3 scores, and information on factors commonly linked to reading achievement. In the following chapter, the researcher will report the findings and discuss the implications of this study. Chapter 5 will discuss conclusions and recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to answer the question: Will students with learning disabilities who were provided reading instruction through the Success For All reading program demonstrate higher reading achievement on selected reading assessments (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test and the Qualitative Reading Inventory-3) than the students with learning disabilities who were provided reading instruction through other reading programs? The seventeen participants studied were third grade students with learning disabilities at three SFA and three Non-SFA schools in one central Florida school district. The researcher collected data on each participant including reading FCAT scores, QRI-3 scores, and information on factors commonly linked to reading achievement. In this chapter, the researcher will report the findings and discuss the implications of this study.

In order to answer the original research question, all reading assessment scores were collected and organized by participant in a spreadsheet as shown in Table 3. A logical analysis, using deductive reasoning, was then conducted. The researcher also determined participants who stood out among the sample based on their QRI-3 and FCAT reading scores. Then, participant scores were then separated into two groups (SFA and Non-SFA) and compared as shown in Table 4. Participants were then matched based on characteristics that are often associated with reading achievement. These characteristics included gender, race, socioeconomic status (determined by participants who were provided free/reduced price lunch), participation in a pre-kindergarten program (as reported by parent/guardian), participation in an English Speakers of

Other Languages (ESOL) program, participation in language therapy, intelligence quotient (IQ), and years in reading program. A comparison of these matched pairs is discussed later in this chapter. In addition, a comparison of the SFA and Non-SFA schools in this study will be provided to determine school wide effects of the Success For All reading program on FCAT reading assessment performance.

Logical Analysis

In this study, the researcher collected FCAT reading scores and administered the QRI-3 reading assessment to all participants. The scores for each participant are shown in Table 3. This table was created to assist the researcher in determining: (a) patterns in and differences among the reading assessment data, (b) possible causes for these differences, (c) relationships between reading assessment performance and the impacting variables from Table 2, and (d) the relationship between the SFA reading program and reading assessment scores.

In Table 3, the rows that are in bold type indicate participants who were retained one grade and consequently received an additional year of the SFA intervention. On the QRI-3, scores of .25 represent the preprimer reading level and scores of .5 represent the primer reading level. QRI-3 scores correspond with grade levels, with scores between 0.25 – 2 representing below grade level, scores at 3 representing on grade level, and scores above 3 representing above grade level. FCAT scores correspond with achievement levels, with scores of level 1 and level 2 representing below grade level, scores at level 3 representing on grade level, and scores above level 3 representing above grade level.

The distribution of QRI-3 and FCAT scores in Table 3 was not normal because of the different number of participants in the two groups, with thirteen in the SFA group and four in the

Non-SFA group. The participants averaged $M = 2.352941$ with a $S. D. = 1.444437$ on the QRI-3 word list. The participants averaged $M = 2.470588$ with a $S. D. = 1.615071$ on the QRI-3 narrative passage. The participants averaged $M = 1.970588$ with a $S. D. = 1.394415$ on the QRI-3 expository passage. The participants averaged $M = 2$ with a $S. D. = 1$ on the FCAT reading test.

A few of the participant scores are not consistent. Participant S1 performed on grade level based on all three QRI-3 subtest scores, but he scored below grade level (level 2) on the FCAT reading test. Participant S7 performed on grade level based on the QRI-3 word list subtest and the FCAT reading test, but he scored significantly below grade level based on the QRI-3 narrative and expository passage subtests (grade level 1 on both). Participant S9 performed significantly below level on all three QRI-3 subtests (grade level 1 for all), but he scored above level on the FCAT reading test. Both participants NS2 and NS4 performed significantly below level on all three QRI-3 subtests.

Content validity was able to be demonstrated for both the QRI-3 and FCAT reading assessments in Table 1, showing both instruments were designed to assess vocabulary and reading comprehension. However, the inconsistencies between the QRI-3 and FCAT reading scores may indicate a difference in what these instruments assess, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

Two variables that appear to be related to the reading assessment scores in this study were race and socioeconomic status. None of the Hispanic participants scored at/above level on the reading FCAT. All of the Hispanic participants participated in an ESOL program. Therefore, it is highly likely that the language barrier for these students impacted their performance on the reading FCAT. Ten participants received free/reduced price lunch, with

seven of these participants scoring below level on the reading FCAT. In this study, it appears that socioeconomic status negatively impacted reading assessment performance as is consistent with many research studies (Coladarci, 2006; Sirin, 2005; White, 1982).

Participants who received language therapy for a language impairment appeared to perform better on the reading FCAT, with 75% (3 of 4) achieving at or above level, than participants who did not report a language impairment or receive therapy, with 43% (3 of 7) achieving at/above level. It is not clear to the researcher if the reading assessment scores of the participants who received language therapy for a language impairment are due to the language impairment, which is unlikely, or because of the language therapy the participants received. All participants with an IQ below 90 scored below level 3 on the reading FCAT. However, participants with an IQ of 90 or above did not appear to have a relationship between their IQ and their reading assessment scores. The characteristics of gender and participation in a pre-kindergarten program did not appear to have an overall impact on the participant reading FCAT scores in this study.

Seven out of thirteen participants in the SFA group participated in the SFA reading program since kindergarten. Five of these participants were retained in one grade. All of the participants who participated in the SFA program since kindergarten and who scored at/above level on the reading FCAT were retained in one grade. Notably, these students may have needed the additional year in the SFA reading intervention in order to score at/above level on the reading FCAT. Three SFA participants who participated in the program since kindergarten scored a level 1 on the reading FCAT. Two of these three students were retained in one grade. When analyzing Table 2 to identify participant similarities of the factors commonly linked to reading achievement, there does not appear to be a common characteristic among these participants. For

these students, it appears that the SFA reading program was not a powerful enough intervention to remedy their weaknesses in reading achievement.

Four participants in the SFA group were in the SFA program less than one year, which was not long enough to determine the impact of the intervention on their reading assessment scores. An interesting fact was that all of these short-term participants scored below level on the reading FCAT. This may have been due to the mobility of these participants or test anxiety. Two of these four participants scored on grade level on the QRI-3 narrative subtest.

In the Non-SFA group, two of the four participants scored at or above level on the reading FCAT assessment. One of these participants had an above average IQ of 122. However, the other participant did not have any of the characteristics commonly associated with reading achievement. These participant reading FCAT scores may have been impacted by the factors of IQ and the absence of factors that influence reading achievement, respectively.

Table 3
Participant Scores on Reading Assessments QRI-3 and FCAT

Participants	QRI-3			Reading FCAT
	Word List	Narrative	Expository	
S1	3	3	3	2
S2	2	1	1	1
S3	5	5	4	3
S4	2	3	2	1
S5	2	2	1	2
S6	4	2	1	1
S7	3	1	1	3
S8	1	2	2	1
S9	1	1	1	4
S10	1	1	1	1
S11	4	4	4	3
S12	2	3	2	1
S13	2	3	2	2
NS1	2	4	3	3
NS2	.5	.5	.25	2
NS3	5	6	5	3
NS4	.5	.5	.25	1

Comparison of SFA and Non-SFA Groups in Reading Achievement

Table 4 shows the mean participant reading scores of SFA and non-SFA participants for the QRI-3 components as well as the reading FCAT achievement levels. The SFA and Non-SFA groups were organized into levels, participants performing below grade level, and participants performing at or above grade level. This was done to assist the researcher in determining the relationship between the SFA reading intervention and the reading assessment scores as well as the difference between the SFA and Non-SFA groups.

The QRI-3 the scores are based on grade levels. Students scoring at the preprimer, primer, first or second grade levels are considered performing below grade level. Students scoring at the third grade level or higher are considered performing at or above grade level. FCAT scores are categorical and based on achievement levels. Students scoring at level 1 or 2 are considered performing below grade level, while students scoring at level 3 or above are considered performing at or above grade level. Table 4 shows the percentages of participants scoring below level and at/above level for both groups, SFA and Non-SFA.

The SFA group had a higher percentage of participants scoring at or above level on the QRI-3 word list subtest, while the Non-SFA group had a higher percentage of participants scoring at or above level on the QRI-3 narrative subtest, the QRI-3 expository subtest, and the FCAT reading test. According to the assessment instrument manual, the QRI-3 narrative subtest is the one used for instructional decisions, but all three subtest results are provided to give the reader a fuller picture of the participants (Leslie & Caldwell, 2001). Table 4 indicates that the percentage of participants scoring at/above level on the reading FCAT was similar to the percentage of participants scoring at/above level on the QRI narrative subtest. This similarity is consistent with the content validity of both reading assessment instruments. Though the

percentages may appear to show a slight difference between the two groups, it should be noted that the sample size was too small which resulted in inflated percentages that are not significantly different.

Table 4
Percentage of Participants Performing Below Level or At/Above Level on Reading Assessments QRI-3 and FCAT

Assessment	SFA (n=13)		Non-SFA (n=4)	
	Below Level	At/Above Level	Below Level	At/Above Level
QRI-3 Word List	62% (8)	38% (5)	75% (3)	25% (1)
QRI-3 Narrative	54% (7)	46% (6)	50% (2)	50% (2)
QRI-3 Expository	77% (10)	23% (3)	50% (2)	50% (2)
Reading FCAT	69% (9)	31% (4)	50% (2)	50% (2)

Note. All proportions are calculated by number of participants achieving categorical level divided by total number of participants for each group, SFA and Non-SFA.

Certainly, the factors often associated with reading achievement for both the SFA and Non-SFA groups were different in respect to race (minority), socioeconomic status (receiving free/reduced price lunch), participation in a pre-kindergarten program, and individuals receiving language therapy. In this study, two characteristics of race and socioeconomic status were found to impact individual participant reading assessment performance. All Hispanic students scored below level on the FCAT reading assessment with inconsistent scores on the QRI-3. The SFA group had more minority than non-minority participants, while the Non-SFA group had equal numbers of minority/non-minority participants.

Seven of the ten study participants that received free/reduced price lunch scored below level on the reading FCAT with inconsistent results on the QRI-3. The SFA group had more participants receiving free/reduced price lunch than not, while the Non-SFA group had an equal number of participants receiving free/reduced price lunch than not. This was not surprising to the researcher, because the SFA schools in this study had a higher percentage of students receiving free/reduced price lunch and a higher percentage of minority students than the Non-SFA schools in this study. Certainly, these differences in factors that impact reading achievement may have influenced the differences in the FCAT and QRI-3 reading assessment scores between the two groups.

Matched Participant Pairs

In order to find another means of comparison, the researcher decided to find a way to pair the participants. Of the seventeen final participants, thirteen were in the SFA group and four were in the Non-SFA group. Because there were only four Non-SFA participants, it was determined to pair the Non-SFA participants with an SFA participant. The researcher identified what was most distinctive about each Non-SFA participant with respect to the variables commonly linked to reading achievement. The four Non-SFA participants were each paired to one similar participant in the SFA group on as many of the impacting variables (gender, race, free-reduced price lunch, preK, ESOL, language therapy, and IQ) as possible. The participant pairs were then labeled and ordered based on their most distinctive characteristic. These participant pairs were matched to assist the researcher in determining the effects of the SFA reading intervention when controlling for as many participant variables as possible.

When matching each of the Non-SFA participants to an SFA participant, the most distinctive characteristic was identified. Participant NS1 had an above average IQ (above 110). Participant NS2 was Hispanic and participated in an ESOL program. Participant NS3 was distinctive in that he did not possess any of the negatively impacting variables. Participant NS4 was enrolled in her school since the beginning of kindergarten.

Pair 1, which were comprised of participants NS4 and S11, were matched on gender (female), socio-economic status (no free/reduced lunch), PreK (no), ESOL (no), and both participants were enrolled in their respective school sites at the beginning of kindergarten and thus were known as the “long-term” pair. Pair 2, which were comprised of participants NS2 and S1, were matched on gender (male), race (Hispanic), socio-economic status (yes free/reduced lunch), and ESOL (yes) and thus were known as the “Hispanic/ESOL” pair. Pair 3, participants NS1 and S5, were know as the “high IQ” pair, and were also matched on race (White), socio-economic status (yes free/reduced lunch), PreK (no), ESOL (no), language therapy (no), and above average IQ (above 110). Pair 4, participants NS3 and S13, were matched on gender (male), race (White), socio-economic status (no free/reduced lunch), PreK (no), and ESOL (no), and thus were know as the “absence of variables” pair. Figure 2 shows a visual comparison of the QRI-3 and FCAT reading assessment scores for these matched pairs.

Figure 2 shows that the SFA participants scored higher overall on the QRI-3 and FCAT reading assessments than the Non-SFA participants in Pair 1 (“long-term”) and Pair 2 (“Hispanic/ESOL”), while the Non-SFA participants scored higher overall on the QRI-3 and FCAT reading assessments than the SFA participants in Pair 3 (“high IQ”) and Pair 4 (“absence of factors”). In the “long-term” pair, the SFA participant may have performed better on the reading assessments because she received the SFA reading intervention since kindergarten. This

pair is considered by the researcher to be the most representative in regards to the power of the SFA reading intervention and its impact on reading assessment performance and should be noted by the reader. The fact that the SFA participant in the “Hispanic/ESOL” pair performed better on the reading assessments than the Non-SFA participant may indicate that the SFA reading program is more effective in delivering reading instruction than other reading programs for second language learners.

Perhaps in the “high IQ” pair, the Non-SFA participant may have performed better on the reading assessments than the SFA participant because of the nine point difference in their IQ’s (122 versus 113). In the “absence of factors” pair, the SFA participant was enrolled at his school for less than one year. This student’s mobility (and not the SFA reading intervention) may have contributed to the fact that this participant did not perform as well as his Non-SFA counterpart on the reading assessments.

Based on this comparison, it appears that the participants who received instruction through the SFA reading program did not necessarily have higher or lower reading achievement than the participants who received instruction through other reading programs as evidenced by the QRI-3 and FCAT reading assessment scores of the matched pairs.

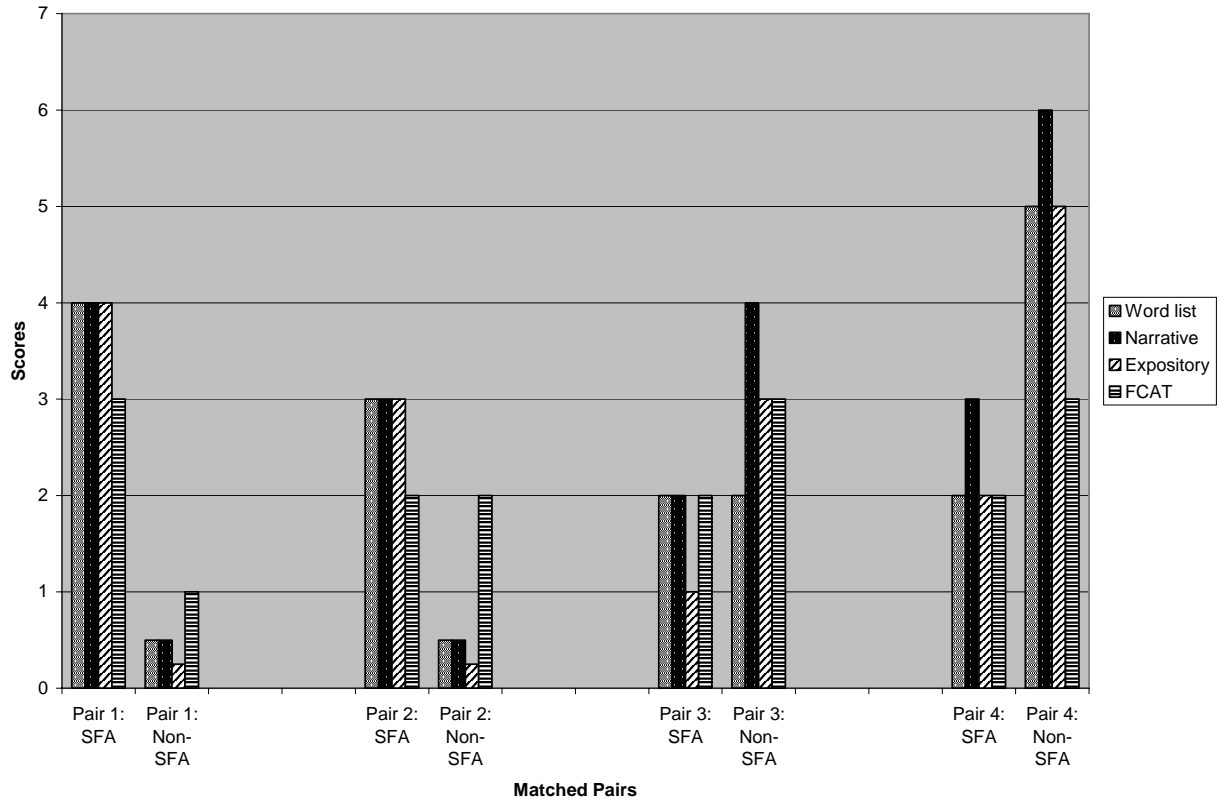


Figure 2. QRI-3 and FCAT Reading Assessment Scores for Matched Participant Pairs

Comparison of SFA and Non-SFA Sites

Given the neutral results from the matched pair method, the researcher decided to attempt to compare school sites rather than individual scores. Therefore, the researcher obtained the 2004 reading FCAT level frequencies for all third graders at each of the three SFA and three Non-SFA sites from the Florida Department of Education (FDOE, 2004a) and organized them in Table 5. This was done because the SFA reading program is a school wide reading program, and the researcher wanted to compare school wide data to determine if this comparison would be consistent with the comparison of SFA and Non-SFA groups in this study.

The Non-SFA sites had a total of 292 third grade students, or 71%, score at or above a level 3 on the FCAT reading test. This was higher than the SFA sites, which had a total of 211 third grade students, or 63%, score at or above a level 3 on the FCAT reading test.

At the beginning of this study, the researcher matched the sites based on socioeconomic status (free/reduced price lunch) and race, but according to the previous comparison of the SFA and Non-SFA sites, it appears that the sites were different in some way based on the variation in percentage of students who scored at or above a level 3 on the FCAT reading test. The SFA schools in the matched site pairs (see Figure 1) in fact had a higher percentage of students receiving free/reduced price lunch and a higher percentage of minority students than their Non-SFA counterparts. These may be characteristics of SFA schools in general due to the nature of the intervention. It would appear that although there was an attempt to match the SFA and Non-SFA schools, the Non-SFA schools overall had a higher achievement rate for students on the third grade FCAT reading test. However, this difference may have been more related to socioeconomic status and race than to the SFA reading intervention. In the next chapter, overall conclusions, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research will be discussed.

Table 5
 FCAT Reading Level Frequencies for All Third Graders at Three SFA Sites and Three Non-SFA Sites

Site	N	FCAT Reading Levels						at/above level
		1	2	3	4	5		
SFA 1	130	25% n 33	19% n 25	37% n 48	17% n 22	2% n 3	56% n 73	
SFA 2	76	28% n 22	20% n 15	33% n 25	17% n 13	3% n 2	53% n 40	
SFA 3	130	11% n 14	15% n 20	34% n 44	38% n 49	3% n 4	75% n 98	
SFA Subtotal	336	21% n 69	15% n 50	35% n 117	25% n 84	3% n 9	63% n 211	
Non-SFA 1	153	21% n 32	12% n 18	38% n 58	25% n 38	5% n 8	67% n 103	
Non-SFA 2	123	23% n 28	13% n 16	37% n 46	24% n 30	2% n 2	64% n 79	
Non-SFA 3	136	11% n 15	9% n 12	39% n 53	32% n 44	10% n 14	81% n 110	
Non-SFA Subtotal	413	18% n 75	11% n 46	38% n 157	27% n 112	6% n 24	71% n 292	
Total	749	19% n 144	13% n 96	37% n 274	26% n 196	4% n 33	67% n 503	

Note. n = number of students scoring at that level.

CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Purpose and Procedures of the Study

The purpose of this study was to answer the research question: Will students with learning disabilities who were provided reading instruction through the Success For All reading program demonstrate higher reading achievement on selected reading assessments (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test and the Qualitative Reading Inventory-3) than the students with learning disabilities who were provided reading instruction through other reading programs?

Seventeen total participants were included in the final data analysis. Thirteen of these individuals received reading instruction through the Success For All reading program, while four individuals received reading instruction through other evidence-based reading programs. For the purpose of this study, it is assumed that all schools were implementing evidence-based reading programs in which all students received systematic instruction in the National Reading Panel's (NICHD, 2000) accepted five components of reading including phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Limitations of the Study

At the onset of this study, several limitations were acknowledged in regard to the interpretation of results. One limitation was that internal validity may have been threatened if participants received different amounts of reading support outside of the Success For All or other reading program. At the conclusion of this study, the researcher is still unclear as to whether or not the participants received additional small group instruction and/or individual tutoring

provided privately or through the school. This limitation is important to note because students with learning disabilities may receive instruction in a general education classroom through an inclusion model, in an exceptional education resource classroom through a pull-out model, or a combination of the two models. This may directly impact the amount of time students received reading instruction.

Another limitation was that the schools not implementing the Success For All program may or may not have been as structured or consistent with instructional delivery as those implementing Success For All. The Success For All Foundation requires as part of its implementation process (SFAF, 2000) that students be regrouped according to their instructional reading level and receive instruction through a daily 90-minute block. Schools that are implementing another reading program may be providing instruction in a different way, such as in small groups within one classroom, which limits the amount of time individual students may have received reading instruction from the teacher.

One of the most important limitations was that the participants who received instruction through the Success For All program did not participate in the program for the same number of years due to varying enrollment dates. At the onset of this study, the researcher anticipated controlling for the number of years SFA participants received instruction. As the study progressed and the sample size diminished, the researcher found only seven out of the thirteen participants in the SFA group had been enrolled in the Success For All program since kindergarten. As a result, the researcher was unable to test the power of the Success For All intervention over longer periods of time.

Another limitation was that the students at the schools implementing Success For All may or may not have the same teacher each nine weeks, based on the program's restructuring

and regrouping characteristics. This long-term relationship may have effected the performance either positively or negatively compared to those who changed teachers due to the established/lack of rapport between teacher and student.

Another important limitation was the high mobility rate of some participants included in the study resulting in students leaving their home school or the school district altogether which affected the final sample size of participants. Eleven participants out of the original 48 potential participants were eliminated from the study due to this limitation.

Concluding Remarks Regarding Nature of the Intervention

The intervention, the Success For All reading program, was not developed specifically for use with students with learning disabilities, though it is being used with this population in this study. In addition, the Success For All reading program does not teach to mastery. However, the students participating in Success For All may repeat a level in the program (determined by the school leader) if they do not pass the placement test to proceed to the next level.

Many instructional programs, including reading programs, have issues with fidelity of treatment. This is often due to the barriers that cause the gap between research and practice (Boardman, Arguelles, Vaughn, Hughes, & Klinger, 2005). Teachers need adequate instructional time, administrative support at the school and district level, and on-going support from the selected reading program researchers. The Success For All Foundation has taken into account these issues and has made an effort to facilitate the successful implementation of their reading program through extensive professional development and a requirement of whole-school involvement (Florida Center for Reading Research, 2005). This professional development is provided by the Success For All Foundation and includes training before program

implementation as well as on-site training and consultation through implementation checks two or three times during the school year.

Concluding Remarks Regarding Nature of the Instruments

At the beginning of the study, the researcher selected the QRI-3 and the FCAT as assessments of participant reading achievement. According to the content validity as demonstrated in Table 1, both instruments were designed to assess both vocabulary and reading comprehension. Specifically, the narrative comprehension passage should correlate with the FCAT reading test because both were designed to test reading comprehension. Based on the data in this study, five participants earned scores that were not consistent across both instruments (see Table 3). Participant S1 performed on grade level based on all 3 QRI-3 subtest scores, but he scored below grade level (level 2) on the FCAT reading test. Participant S7 performed on grade level based on the QRI-3 word list subtest and the FCAT reading test, but he scored significantly below grade level based on the QRI-3 narrative and expository passage subtests (grade level 1 on both). Participant S9 performed significantly below level on all 3 QRI-3 subtests (grade level 1 for all), but he scored above level on the FCAT reading test. Both participants NS2 and NS4 performed significantly below level on all 3 QRI-3 subtests. After reviewing these results, it does not appear that the QRI-3 provided more information than the reading FCAT.

The inconsistencies between the QRI-3 and FCAT reading assessment results demonstrate that these instruments are not correlated. The QRI-3 assesses reading achievement through the process of reading through phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and reading comprehension. This instrument is useful in determining the instructional needs of individual students. The reading FCAT, on the other hand, assesses how students perform on grade-level

reading skills. If a student is unable to read on grade level, the reading FCAT score indicates that they are below level, but does not provide feedback for teachers to inform instructional practices.

Recently, the FCAT reading test itself has been called into question based on the discrepant scores of third graders by the Department of Education (Postal, 2007). In 2007, the third grade test scores were not as high as in 2006. After reviewing the 2006 test scores, the Department of Education believes that the 2006 test was written in a way that was easier than both the 2005 and 2007 versions, in particular due to question placement within the test. Though these test versions do not apply directly to the year in this study, this may have implications in that the FCAT reading test may not be as reliable as the researcher first believed. If this is the case, any conclusions made from this study would be less powerful.

Moreover, using high-stakes testing for students with disabilities can be damaging to the individual's self-esteem and motivation (Meek, 2006; Samuels, 2005). For students who struggle to read words and sentences, the density of text on a single page can be overwhelming. When students can not comprehend and engage the assessment materials due to the depth of test questions, the scores cannot accurately report meaningful academic progress or regression. Finally, students with disabilities often give up and mark answers at random during the long duration of standardized tests (Meek, 2006). These flaws in testing create negative outcomes. Instead, we should be assessing individual student achievement and growth, and using this information to drive instruction based on student need. Perhaps one of the lessons learned from this study is that individually administered tests based on real samples of reading offer more robust and reliable measures to inform instruction.

Summary and Implications of Findings

Because of the small number of participants, the researcher is reluctant to make broad generalizations in reporting and discussing the findings of this study. However, it appears that students with learning disabilities who received reading instruction through the Success For All program did not perform better on the FCAT or QRI-3 reading assessments than students who received reading instruction through other programs. As noted in Figure 2, the SFA participants scored higher overall on the QRI-3 and FCAT reading assessments than the Non-SFA participants in Pair 1 and Pair 2, while the Non-SFA participants scored higher overall on the QRI-3 and FCAT reading assessments than the SFA participants in Pair 3 and Pair 4. The results of this pairwise comparison provide mixed results in relation to the research question.

Although the findings of this study are limited, they should be reexamined in relation to the new identification process for students with learning disabilities, Response-to-Intervention Model (RtI) proposed in the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004). In the state of Florida, the diagnostic criteria for learning disabilities as it applies to this study was that the student must: (a) be of average or above average intelligence, (b) demonstrate a discrepancy between intelligence and academic achievement, and (c) demonstrate a discrepancy between intelligence and cognitive processing (Prevatt & Proctor, 2004). However, the new RtI model (IDEA, 2004) emphasizes a focus on earlier intervention through scientific, research-based practices for students experiencing difficulty learning to read (James, 2004). This model uses progress monitoring and data analysis results to determine which services and interventions to provide students at increasing levels of intensity through a multi-tiered approach (Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, 2006). Students may move between three levels of intervention, or tiers, in which they receive instruction through (a) Tier 1: a core program based

on evidence-based practices; (b) Tier 2: supplementary interventions; and (c) Tier 3: intensive interventions which may lead to special education services (Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, 2006).

According to the RtI model, the Success For All program would be considered a Tier 1 intervention. In this study, four of the thirteen participants who received instruction through the Success For All reading program achieved a level 3 or higher on the FCAT reading assessment, telling the reader that the SFA reading intervention was successful for these students . Although the participants in this study were identified as having a learning disability under the older discrepancy model (Prevatt & Proctor, 2004), it is important to note how they might have fared under the new RtI model. Based on this newer model, these individuals who positively responded to the SFA intervention of systematic instruction in reading would not have been labeled as learning disabled in the first place. If this were the case, these individuals would not have been included in this study, and the mean FCAT and QRI-3 reading assessment scores would have been lower for the participant sample.

Recommendations for Future Study

The final sample was smaller than the researcher intended at the onset of this study. This was in large part due to a high attrition rate, mobility rates, and possible miscommunication between the researcher and school sites regarding participant inclusion criteria.

One of the participant inclusion criteria was that the individual had to have a learning disability. In education, the term “learning disabled” is treated as a heterogeneous label. In actuality, there are several subtypes of learning disabilities within this group. These subtypes include (a) dyslexia or difficulty making sense of written language, (b) dysgraphia or difficulty

writing in a way that makes sense to others or yourself, (c) dyscalculia or difficulty with mathematical calculations, (d) developmental articulation disorder or difficulty producing speech sounds, (e) developmental expressive language disorder or difficulty expressing yourself verbally, (f) auditory processing disorder or difficulty understanding what others say, (g) visual processing disorder or difficulty understanding what you see, (h) dyspraxia or difficulty with fine motor skills, and (i) nonverbal learning disorder or difficulty understanding nonverbal communication (Jaffe-Gill & de Benedictis, 2007). It is unknown to the researcher which specific learning disability each participant had. This may be important information to consider when conducting future research in regards to best reading instructional practices with students within each subtype of learning disability.

Notably, the results of this study are not consistent with the current research on the Success For All reading program (Hurley, Chamberlain, Slavin, & Madden, 2001; SFAF, 2000; Slavin, 1996). Although the Success For All reading program was not designed specifically for students with learning disabilities, it was created to ensure that all students are reading on grade level by the end of grade three (Florida Center For Reading Research, 2005). In this particular study, the participants did not spend a consistent amount of time receiving instruction through the Success For All program. For a study to have powerful results, the participants must receive the intervention for the same amount of time.

At the onset of this study, the researcher intended to determine the powerfulness of the Success For All reading program as an intervention for students with learning disabilities. The intervention was to be provided for at least 3.7 school years, or since the beginning of kindergarten for each participant. It is important to note the nature of longitudinal research and its inherent problems. Looking at young students over time is very difficult due to several issues.

These include the high cost and large amount of time required (Ruspini, 2000). Also, this type of research requires a long-term commitment of staff and participants as well as the adequate replacement of staff over time (Matton et al., 2007). Another important consideration is the representativeness of the sample both at the beginning and during the study (Matton et al., 2007). Considering how challenging it can be, the researcher has developed a more powerful sense of respect for individuals and institutions as they attempt longitudinal research.

In the future, additional studies with larger sample sizes should be conducted around the Success For All reading program and its effectiveness for students with learning disabilities. These studies should control for as many factors as possible, including the number of years students participate in the Success For All program. These findings should then be compared with research on other scientific, research-based reading programs to determine which, if any, programs demonstrate a statistically significant effect on the reading achievement of students with learning disabilities.

In summary, the Success For All reading program did not show higher achievement for students who were labeled learning disabled than other evidenced-based reading programs. It appears that the effects of poverty and other factors in combination with a learning disability have a strong impact on reading achievement. The results indicate that many of the participants with learning disabilities in this study were retained and failed to achieve grade level expectations. Professionals have a responsibility to identify interventions to ensure that this population of students is not left behind.

APPENDIX A: IRB LETTER



Office of Research

May 16, 2004

Stacey Lynn Smith
1255 Marina Pt. #213
Casselberry, FL 32707

Dear Ms. Smith:

With reference to your protocol entitled, "Does Success for all Impact the Reading Achievement of Students with Learning Disabilities?" I am enclosing for your records the approved, executed document of the UCFIRB Form you had submitted to our office.

Please be advised that this approval is given for one year. Should there be any addendums or administrative changes to the already approved protocol, they must also be submitted to the Board. Changes should not be initiated until written IRB approval is received. Adverse events should be reported to the IRB as they occur. Further, should there be a need to extend this protocol, a renewal form must be submitted for approval at least one month prior to the anniversary date of the most recent approval and is the responsibility of the investigator (UCF).

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 823-2901.

Please accept our best wishes for the success of your endeavors.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Grayson".

Chris Grayson
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Copies: Dr. Lee Cross
Dr. Sherron Roberts
IRB File

APPENDIX B: DISTRICT PERMISSION LETTER



SEMINOLE COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

WILLIAM VOGEL, Ed.D.
Superintendent

Educational Support Center
400 E. Lake Mary Boulevard
Sanford, Florida 32773-7127

RAYMOND L. GAINES
*Executive Director of
Secondary Education*

RONALD L. PINNELL, Ed.D.
*Executive Director of
Secondary Education*

Telephone: (407) 320-0039

Facsimile: (407) 320-0293

Suncom: 351-0038

Visit Our Web Site
www.scps.k12.fl.us

January 23, 2004

Ms. Stacey Lynn Smith
1255 Marina Pt. #213
Casselberry, FL. 32707

Dear Ms. Smith:

I am in receipt of the proposal and supplemental information that you submitted for permission to conduct research in the Seminole County Public Schools. After review of these documents, it has been determined that you are granted permission to conduct the study described in these documents under the conditions described herein.

Each school principal has the authority to decide if he/she wishes to participate in your study or if it is appropriate to release any requested information. Therefore, your first order of business is to contact the principal(s) of the school(s) that you wish to involve in your research to explain your project and seek permission to conduct the research at that particular school.

You are expected to make appointments in advance to accommodate the administration and/or staff of the school for research time. Furthermore, any processing or comparison of data will be your responsibility and shall not impact our Testing Department.

Please forward a summary of your project to my office upon completion.
Good Luck!

Sincerely,

Ronald L. Pinnell, Ed.D.
Executive Director
Secondary Education

APPENDIX C: PARENT CONSENT FORM

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am a graduate student at the University of Central Florida under the supervision of faculty members Dr. Lee Cross and Dr. Sherron Roberts. I am conducting research on reading instruction for elementary students with learning disabilities. The purpose of this study is to determine if the Success For All reading program impacts student achievement for students with learning disabilities as measured by the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and the Qualitative Reading Inventory III (QRI-3) while controlling for intelligence quotients (IQ's). The results of the study may help teachers of students with learning disabilities better understand the amount of knowledge gained and allow them to select instructional materials accordingly. These results may not directly help your child today, but may benefit future students.

The participating children will read a story out loud and answer comprehension questions about that story. The story will be selected from the Qualitative Reading Inventory III passages. A member of my research team will present the procedure during the regular school day. The procedure will take place once during the 2004-2005 school year. Although the children's names will be on the IQ, FCAT and QRI-3 performance results for matching purposes, their identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. We will replace their names with code numbers. Results will only be reported in the form of group data. Participation or non-participation in this study will not affect the children's grades or placement in any programs.

You and your child have the right to withdraw consent for your child's participation at any time without consequence. There are no known risks or immediate benefits to the participants. No compensation is offered for participation. Group results of this study will be available in August upon request. If you have any questions about this research project, please contact me at (407) 416-4397 or my faculty supervisors, Dr. Lee Cross at (407) 823-5477 and Dr. Sherron Roberts at (407) 823-2016. Questions or concerns about research participants' rights may be directed to the UCFIRB office, University of Central Florida Office of Research, Orlando Tech Center, 12443 Research Parkway, Suite 207, Orlando, FL 32826. The hours of operation are 8:00 am until 5:00 pm, Monday through Friday except on University of Central Florida official holidays. The phone number is (407) 823-2901.

Sincerely,

Stacey Lynn Smith

_____ I have read the procedure described above.

_____ I voluntarily give my consent for my child, _____, to participate in Stacey Smith's study of reading instruction for elementary students with learning disabilities.

_____ / _____

Parent/Guardian

Date

_____ I would like to receive a copy of the procedure description.

_____ I would not like to receive a copy of the procedure description.

2nd Parent/Guardian or Witness if no 2nd Parent/Guardian) Date

APPENDIX D: CHILD ASSENT FORM

Child Assent Form

Script: My name is Stacey Smith (or other member of research team's name) and I am a student at the University of Central Florida. I would like to ask you to read a story out loud and then ask you some questions about the story. You may stop at any time and you will not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Would you like to do this?

_____/_____
Student Date

_____/_____
Witness Date

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