5-2015

Elementary Educators' Perceptions of Practices that Contribute to Literacy Achievement

Sherry S. King Mrs.
East Tennessee State University

Elementary Educators' Perceptions of Practices that Contribute to Literacy Achievement

_____

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

_____

by

Sherry S. King

May 2015

_____

Dr. Pamela Scott, Chair

Dr. Virginia Foley

Dr. Cecil Blankenship

Dr. Catherine Glascock

Keywords:

Reading Instruction, Literacy Best Practices, Achievement Gap, Struggling Readers, Intervention

ABSTRACT

Elementary Educators' Perceptions of Practices that Contribute to Literacy Achievement

by

Sherry S. King

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate and examine specific kindergarten through third grade practices perceived as contributing to literacy achievement at 3 high-achieving elementary schools within the Washington County Virginia Public School System. The study was completed through a process of open-ended interviews with participants comprising classroom teachers, reading specialists, and administrators. The findings from this study may assist practitioners by providing information relative to programs, resources and instructional strategies that are perceived as contributing to literacy achievement.

The findings of this study suggested that the perceptions among classroom teachers, reading specialists, and administrators regarding literacy practices were parallel. In summation, the participants' perceptions included a balanced approach to literacy instruction with an emphasis on the following: phonics acquisition in kindergarten through second grade; a focus on explicit comprehension instruction beginning in third grade; development of vocabulary to increase background knowledge and comprehension; frequent opportunities for independent reading practice; targeted instruction in small-group and one-on-one settings; and the use of supplemental literacy and assessment resources.

Recommendations from this study included the consideration of providing balanced literacy instruction in kindergarten through third grade; an emphasis on phonics skills in kindergarten through second grade, and an emphasis on comprehension skills beginning in third grade; frequent and consistent guided and independent reading time within the classroom setting; an increased emphasis on vocabulary development; the provision of targeted small-group and one-on-one instruction; and the use of supplemental literacy and assessment resources.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated first and foremost to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, whose guidance and strength were ever present throughout this journey. To my wonderful husband Jimmy, for his steadfast patience and support from the beginning to the end of this project. To my remarkable daughters Jordan and Kalyn, my amazing son Ty, my precious granddaughter Reagan, and my son-in-law Anthony for the laughter, joy, and continuous encouragement that motivated me during this doctoral journey. To my extraordinary grandmother, Maxine Middleton, whose priceless wisdom and relentless passion for life have inspired me to pursue my dreams. To my special friends, family, and colleagues whose kind and encouraging words were an invaluable inspiration to me throughout this process.

 I am exceedingly blessed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express by sincere gratitude to my dissertation committee, Dr. Pamela Scott, Chair, Dr. Virginia Foley, Dr. Catherine Glascock, and Dr. Cecil Blankenship for their invaluable guidance and support throughout this process. A special thank you and warm appreciation is extended to the administrators, teachers, and schools for their participation and support of this research project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Each school year millions of students begin the complex process of learning how to read. Most accomplish this task successfully while others progress at a slower pace; however, for some children reading development is challenging and can appear unattainable (Bond & Dykstra, 1966/1997). Many parents, educators, and scholars have attested that failure to learn to read can exact long-term implications for school success and beyond (National Early Literacy Panel, 2008). As affirmed by Ferrandino and Tirozzi (2004) "under-developed literacy skills are the number one reason why students are retained, assigned to special education, given long-term remedial services, and why they fail to graduate from high school" (para. 4). With this in mind, it is through an extensive knowledge base of multiple reading strategies and an understanding of individual student needs that practitioners can create an appropriate balance of instructional elements that address the varied needs of all (International Reading Association Position Statement, 1998). Nevertheless, while the search continues for a superior instructional method that will prevent reading difficulties and thus facilitate the growth of all children, the most effective modality of instruction will likely continue to generate discussion and debate among scholars in the field for decades.

Statement of the Problem

The accountability and educational reform movement stimulated by the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001, *the Individuals with Disabilities Act* of 2004, and a number of state laws and policies resulted in political pressure to increase academic achievement for targeted subgroups in reading and mathematics as specified by the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP)

benchmarks, and aroused a renewed interest in what research has to say about literacy practices, especially in the early grades (Allington, 2012). These laws brought the concept of quality of instruction to the forefront, and called attention to the educational needs of all students, especially at-risk students who have not progressed at a comparable rate as their same-aged peers.

While the reading debates continue, there is no clear evidence of a single program, method, or approach that has proven successful in teaching all students to read (Gambrell, Malloy, & Mazzoni, 2011). However, studies have confirmed that virtually all children can be taught to read by the end of their first grade year and remain on level through the end of their third-grade year with no additional support (Allington, 2012; Mathes et al., 2005; Vellutino et al., 1996). Although research suggests that most students can meet grade-level expectations with appropriate supports, a disproportionate number of students who fail to meet grade-level expectations in reading initially are presumed to have a learning disability emanating from a cognitive limitation or other environmental influences and may be referred for special education testing and/or retained at grade level (Allington, 2012; Vellutino, Fletcher, Snowling, & Scanlon, 2004). In contrast to these assumptions about ability and commonly used intervention practices, Vellutino et al. (2004) provided conclusive evidence that reading deficits may not be related to a child's biological cognitive deficiencies as some practitioners suggest, but rather the result of inadequate instruction or other experiential causes. In a similar vein, Clay (1991) pointed out that research regarding reading disabilities fails to consider the possible adverse effects of the child's educational deficiencies that can lead to reading difficulties that mimic cognitive deficits. Furthermore, Allington (2012) stressed that access to quality reading instruction can accelerate literacy acquisition skills and subsequently lead to fewer children meeting the federal definition

of students with learning disabilities. However, while research suggests that 98% of children can become proficient readers (Allington, 2012), only one third of students in the United States read at the proficient level (National Assessment of Education Progress, 2013).

Although a prolific body of conclusive evidence exists on the positive results of literacy practices that contribute to student achievement, educators' perceptions about what constitutes these practices along with expectations for level of cognitive and academic proficiency for the specified subgroups may vary according to grade level or subject area taught, years of experience, culture of the school, and quality and frequency of professional development opportunities. In relation to this, extensive research underlies the fact that teacher quality supersedes any singular curricular program and is considered the most critical factor in the advancement of student achievement (Allington, 2012; Gambrell et al., 2011; Sander & Rivers, 1996; Stronge, 2010). Finally, studies have determined that if the literacy practices of the most expert teachers could be implemented everywhere, reading acquisition for all students would be dramatic (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkenson 1985; Pressley & Allington, 2014; Stanovich, 2000).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate and examine specific kindergarten through third grade practices perceived as contributing to literacy achievement at three high-achieving elementary schools within the Washington County Virginia Public School System. The study's findings were completed through a process that included 18 open-ended interviews with participants comprising 12 classroom teachers, three reading specialists, and three elementary administrators. The findings from this study provided further insight into programs, resources, and instructional strategies associated with literacy achievement.

Educators' perceptions of practices that contribute to literacy achievement vary. In order to arrive at an understanding of these perceptions at the elementary level within the parameters of the Washington County Virginia Public School District, this qualitative study was focused upon one overarching research question: What are the perceptions of kindergarten through third-grade teachers, reading specialists, and administrators about practices that contribute to literacy achievement? In addition, the following subquestions were addressed:

1. What programs and various resources do elementary educators perceive as contributing to literacy achievement?

2. What instructional strategies do elementary educators perceive as contributing to literacy achievement?

Significance of the Study

Current and revised provisions of the federally mandated *NCLB Act* dictate that all public schools meet or exceed Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) benchmarks in reading and mathematics for all students and targeted subgroups through standardized testing. According to the Virginia Department of Education 2015 Annual Measureable Objectives (AMO) specifications, 72% of all students must achieve a minimum score of 400 on the reading portion of the Standards of Learning Assessment, and 68% of all students must achieve a minimum score of 400 on the mathematics portion of the SOL assessment. In addition to these provisions, the new teacher evaluation system specifies that student performance data be factored in as 40% of the final evaluation (Virginia Department of Education, 2014).

Allington (2012) hypothesized that policy makers believe increasing accountability

measures and penalties for teachers and schools will close the achievement gap in reading for all children; however, despite the existence of such measures and penalties via the *NCLB Act*, no evidence exists that reading achievement has improved substantially as a result of *NCLB*. Furthermore, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reported in 2013 that only 34% of fourth graders performed at or above proficient in reading on mandated assessments. Although attaining the equivalent of 1 year of growth is the general goal for most students, those who begin the school year reading below grade level must demonstrate more than 1 year of growth by progressing at a greater rate than the expected rate of students reading on grade level (Allington, 2012). Therefore, accelerated growth in reading for students represented in targeted subgroups must occur if the academic achievement gap is to be significantly narrowed and federal accountability sanctions avoided.

This study sought to identify key elements found in literacy instruction delivered by kindergarten through third-grade teachers. The identification of these elements became evident as a result of the exploration of educators' perceptions that shape instructional practices. This study expands the existing research that encompasses evidenced-based literacy pedagogy and may result in improved instruction, increased student achievement, and overall future school success.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

It is essential to note the limitations that may reduce the generalizability of the findings in interpreting this research. Significant is the degree to which all participants truthfully answered the interview questions. Second, the fact that the researcher is currently a principal, served 2 years as Coordinator of Federal Programs and Grants, taught first grade and kindergarten, and

holds a Reading Specialist degree might also serve as an added limitation through her own biases. The fact that the researcher developed a reading routine currently being practiced in some of the classrooms being studied might serve as an added limitation.

The study was delimited to three elementary schools in the Washington County Public School System. The teachers selected for this project have proved to be successful as reading teachers; however, it is likely that the results are not representative of all reading teachers in the U.S. Likewise, it is also unknown whether similar results may be achieved with less expert teachers or in underperforming schools. Finally, although the elements outlined in this study are evidenced-based reading strategies, it is unclear if alternate or supplementary strategies might produce similar results.

Definition of Terms

1. Acceleration – Reading growth that exceeds the expected rate.

2. Achievement gap – "The difference between the performance of subgroups of students, especially those defined by gender, race/ethnicity, disability and socioeconomic status" (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

3. Adequate yearly progress (AYP) – "An individual state's measure of yearly progress toward achieving state academic standards. Adequate Yearly Progress is the minimum level of improvement that states, school districts and schools must achieve each year." (U.S Department of Education, 2004).

4. At-risk students – Students who have a higher than average probability of dropping out.

5. Background knowledge – "What students already know, through learning and experience, about a topic or about a text" (Cooper & Kiger, 2003, p.523).

6. Balanced literacy instruction – "Literacy instruction that incorporates both teacher-directed instructions and student-centered activities" (p. 523).

7. Basal series – "A set of texts and other materials produced by a given publisher for teaching literacy" (p.523).

8. Cold read – "Reading a passage aloud without prior silent reading or preparation. Sometimes used when checking fluency" (Cooper, Kiger, Robinson, & Slansky, 2012, p. 507).

9. Decodable text – "A published or created text that is suitable for the application of previously taught phonics skills" (Cooper et al., 2012, p. 508)

10. Differentiated instruction – "Instruction that is designed to accommodate a student's strengths, needs, and stage of development" (Cooper & Kiger, 2003, p.524).

11. Evidence-based reading instruction- "…particular program or collection of instructional practices has a record of success. That is, there is reliable, trustworthy, and valid evidence to suggest that when the program is used with a particular group of children, the children can be expected to make adequate gains in reading achievement" (International Reading Association, 2002, p.2).

12. Explicit instruction – "Direct, teacher-led instruction. Involves teacher modeling, student practice with teacher guidance and feedback, and student application in a new situation. Term is uses interchangeably with direct instruction" (Cooper & Kiger, 2003, p.524-525).

13. High achieving schools – Schools that "consistently exhibit an unusually high academic achievement level given the student population they serve" (Perez & Socias, 2008, p. 114).

14. Independent reading level – "The level of material that a reader can read, with few word recognition problems and good comprehension, without instructional support" (Cooper, et al., 2012, p. 509).

15. Intervention – "An instructional program that prevents or stops failure by providing additional instructional time beyond the core instruction" (Cooper et al., 2012, p. 510).

16. Instructional reading level – "The level of material that a reader can read with instructional support" (Cooper et al., 2012, p. 509).

17. Literacy – "Ability to listen, speak, read, write, and think" (Cooper & Kiger, 2003, p. 525). Terms reading and literacy are reading are often used interchangeably.

18. Scaffolding – "The process of providing strong teacher support at the beginning of new learnings and gradually taking it away to allow the student to achieve independence" (Cooper & Kiger, 2003).

19. Struggling reader – "Any student who is having difficulty reading" (Cooper et al., 2012, p. 513).

Overview of the Study

This qualitative study was an examination of the instructional practices and philosophies of 12 kindergarten through third-grade classroom teachers, three reading specialists, and three building-level administrators within the elementary school settings. Chapter 1 contains an introduction, statement of the problem, significance of the problem, research questions, limitations and delimitations of the study, and definitions of terms. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature encompassing literacy. Chapter 3 details the methodology used to answer two research questions. Chapter 4 provides an analysis and explanation of the data, and

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the Chapter 4 data followed by the conclusion, recommendations for practice, suggestions for expanding the research, and summary.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The review of the literature, providing a concise overview of the findings associated with the research on evidenced-based reading practices, is divided accordingly: Section one provides an overview of past and present state and federal initiatives and reforms for public school students. Section two includes a historical account of reading instruction in the United States. Section three addresses evidenced-based practices and skills associated with successful literacy. Following section three are conclusive remarks discussing the information presented within the Review of the Literature.

Era of Accountability and Educational Reform

All children can learn. At the center of this philosophy of education lies the fundamental belief that when educators, students, and parents embrace and accept responsibility for this principle, significant improvements in student achievement can occur. Clear from the relevant research is that although "there is no single factor at the core of a successful school" (Chenoweth, 2009, p. 312) academic success can be increased in school communities that support student learning. Whereas the following is not a comprehensive list of evidence-based characteristics or factors that can influence school success, established research supports these basic precepts:

    1. High-quality instructional leadership (Allington, 2012; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001; Stronge, 2011;Whitaker, 2012)

    2. Shared mission and goals (Williamson & Blackburn, 2010)

3. High expectations for student learning (Stronge, 2011)

4. Continuous data monitoring (Jensen, 2009)

5. Ongoing professional development

6. Parent and community involvement (Jensen, 2009)

7. Building positive relationships (Payne, 1998).

While all of these elements clearly provide an impetus for student success, Stronge (2011)

argued that improving teacher quality is the most critical factor for "dramatically and

systematically" improving the quality of our schools:

> Although we can reform the curriculum, ultimately, it is teachers who implement it; although we can provide professional development on new instructional strategies, ultimately, it is teachers who deploy them; although we can focus on data analysis of student performance, ultimately, it is teachers who produce the results we are analyzing. (pp. 3-4)

Reading is Fundamental

Reading is a fundamental skill that encompasses all facets of life. The ability to read,

write, and think critically are essential to a child's school success and future beyond the

academic world. Reading is the keystone to education and the advancement of a democracy

(Adams, 1990). Good literacy skills are needed for social and economic progress (Snow, Burns,

& Griffin, 1998). And while the returns a country receives on its investment in education from

preschool through college are high, "the returns are highest from the early years of schooling"

(Anderson et al., 1985, p.1).

The demand for literate individuals in an increasingly complex technological society is

essential, as present-day graduates require literacy skills that are considerably more advanced

than those required of past generations (Kamil et al., 2008). Consequently, continuous pressure

to increase student academic achievement as a result of national reform measures for America's

public schools has placed literacy as a major priority in the scope of educational accountability. As U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan once stated:

> If America's students are to remain competitive in a knowledge-based economy, our public schools must greatly accelerate the rate of progress of the last four years and do more to narrow America's large achievement gaps. It is an urgent moral and economic imperative that our schools do a better job of preparing students for today's globally-competitive world. (U.S. Department of Education, 2013)

Historical Account of Educational Law

Achievement in education has traditionally been a crucial aspect of the American Dream, as it ensures a successful future and continues to allow for progress and upward mobility within a democratic society. Throughout history, however, many were subjected to an unequal or substandard education compared to that received by the majority of the population (Webb, 2006). While originally rooted in equalizing educational opportunities for Black Americans, the American Civil Rights Movement later advanced the rights of those from other racial and ethnic, groups, females, and those with disabilities.

More than a decade after the landmark school desegregation decision of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas,* the *Civil Rights Act* of 1964 arose as one of the most significant acts of legislation in American history (Webb, 2006). Initiated by President John F. Kennedy and signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson, this statute made segregation in public facilities unlawful, prohibited work-place discrimination, and required any federally-funded program to uphold nondiscriminatory practices. Following the passage of these landmark civil rights statutes, explained Webb (2006), the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* of 1965 *(ESEA)* mandated equal educational opportunities for all children through the appropriation of federal funding for public schools. As a benefit of the Title I section of this act, subsidized assistance was provided to local school districts that served high populations of economically

and educationally disadvantaged students. In addition, other *ESEA* sections included

appropriated funding for library materials, textbooks, and various instructional resources.

Although the passage of major legislation earmarked more than $1 billion annually in federal

funding for public education, the battle for equal rights for minorities, females, and the disabled

was just beginning (Webb, 2006). Controversy and radicalism reigned supreme throughout the

1960s and 1970s as debates over civil rights, school prayer, freedom of speech, and censorship

predominated the public school setting.

Educational Reform Movement

    ESEA has been reauthorized in association with incoming presidential administrations

over the past 4 decades as a direct result of varying political platforms, bringing about new

school reforms and initiatives that were not without dispute (Webb, 2006). Indeed, the 1980s

ushered in a new educational reform era as the standards and accountability movement gained

momentum, consequently shifting the focus from equity to excellence and from social justice to

economics and international competitiveness. The impetus for the shift, explained Webb (2006),

was forged by a series of reports from commissions, foundations, and organizations as a response

to charges of a declining state of public education. Furthermore, the National Commission on

Excellence in Education, appointed by President Ronald Reagan, published the first in the series

of these reports entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (1983). *A*

Nation at Risk, a landmark in the history of the educational reform movement, drew critical

acclaim for its declaration of a national educational system in crisis, igniting three waves of

initiatives that became the blueprint for improving achievement and accountability at the state

and local levels. Conversely, some scholars argued that *A Nation at Risk* failed to prove that

public schools were to blame for the global and economic lag in the U.S., calling the report a "hoax" and citing statistics showing that U.S. students were performing comparably to international counterparts (Spring, 2011).

Reform initiatives were unabated as President George H.W. Bush instituted an education summit in 1989 chaired by Governor Bill Clinton, following ongoing criticism of lack of educational progress in association with the three waves of reform (Webb, 2006). An agreement transpired as a result of the summit regarding the need to increase academic standards and hold schools accountable for student achievement, laying the groundwork for *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* (1994). Webb (2006) explained that six national goals were adopted as a result of *Goals 2000* as President Clinton attempted to honor his pledge to improve public education. The act underscored the essentials of providing and maintaining educational excellence for all students, thus shifting the focus from supplemental and compensatory services. Included under this umbrella of reform was the *Improving Schools Act (IASA)*, a reauthorization of *ESEA*. Webb (2006) pointed out that the major accountability measures relative to *IASA* were specifications concerning school improvement plans that required integration of increased challenge into the curricula, along with the requirement that all students, including students with disabilities, participate in state and local assessments. With the expectation of increased accountability came standards-based testing, school report cards, sanctions for low-performing schools, and school choice—all of these facets became pivotal to the controversial legislation that would follow.

<u>No Child Left Behind</u>

The topic of educational reform continued to be a perpetual pawn on the political stage, as George W. Bush sought to reframe the issue of standards and accountability during the 2000 presidential election. Included in his platform were school vouchers, phonics-based reading instruction, character and abstinence sex education, mandated standards and high-stakes testing (Webb, 2006). The reform would become a cornerstone to the Bush presidency, as the groundbreaking legislation would prove to alter the focus and scope of the educational landscape for decades to come.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 was signed into law by President George W. Bush as part of the reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, thus expanding the role of the federal government in education (Webb, 2006). In accordance with the enactment, public schools were required to administer state-mandated assessments to all students in grades 3 through 8 in reading and mathematics. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) was met and sanctions avoided if a specified percentage of students in each subgroup achieved grade-level proficiency. Furthermore, the law required all students in disability, socioeconomics, race and ethnicity, and English proficiency subgroups to successfully reach the proficient level in reading and mathematics by 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Although subsequent changes in the law would halt the stipulation that all students gain proficiency by the 2014 deadline, the search for common ground and attempts to overhaul what some deemed a failed system would continue.

A Blueprint for Reform

In March 2010 the U.S. Department of Education released a proposal by the Obama Administration regarding the reauthorization of *ESEA* within the framework of the *NCLB Act*, entitled *A Blueprint for Reform* (2010). The four-part *A Blueprint for Reform* (2010) was designed to build upon the reforms already made in response to the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act* of 2009. Four areas were outlined:

1. Improving teacher and principal effectiveness to ensure that every classroom has a great teacher and every school has a great leader

2. Providing information to families to help them evaluate and improve their children's schools and to educators to help them improve their students' learning

3. Implementing college and career-ready standards and developing improved assessments aligned with those standards

4. Improving students' learning and achievement in America's lowest-performing schools by providing intensive support and effective interventions. (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 3)

President Obama outlined his administration's overall objective in this four-part 2010 Blueprint (2010):

> And instead of investing in the status quo we must reform our schools to accelerate student achievement, close achievement gaps, inspire our children to excel, and turn around those schools that for too many young Americans aren't providing them with the education they need to succeed in college and a career. (p.6)

Common Core and Standards of Learning

Under the *NCLB* flexibility waivers granted by the U.S. Department of Education,

Virginia instituted annual measurable objectives (AMOs) for decreasing proficiency gaps

between low- and high-performing schools. Thus, the new reading and mathematics

performance objectives replaced the former Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets that

schools were required to meet under the federal guidelines. The AMOs are representative of the

percentage of students in each subgroup that must reach the proficiency level on the Standards of

Learning (SOL) assessments in reading and mathematics in order for schools to meet AYP

objectives. The SOLs reflect the minimum requirements for student academic growth in

English, mathematics, science, and history as measured by year-end achievement tests (Virginia

Department of Education, 2014).

The *Common Core* standards, modeled after Virginia's SOL assessment program and

sponsored by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School

Officers (CCSSO), were created to ensure that students attain the essential knowledge and skills

necessary to be successful in college and the workforce. Although 43 states have adopted the

Common Core competitive grant and entitlement program, Virginia remains committed to the

existing SOL program begun in 1995. The decision was based in part upon the precept that

Virginia's accountability system has garnered wide-spread acceptance by Virginia's educators

(Virginia Department of Education, 2014). Further, the recently revised English and

mathematics SOLs are comparable to the *Common Core* content and level of rigor. Although

Virginia could potentially receive $250 million through *Race to the Top* grants, the

Commonwealth's current investment in the SOLs substantially exceeds this amount (Virginia

Department of Education, 2014).

<u>The Achievement Gap</u>

Sixty years have passed and billions of federal dollars have been expended since the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision; nevertheless, the achievement gap between specific subgroups has not closed significantly. Throughout the last 4 decades substantiated research established that U.S. schools have failed to provide an equal education for all students, resulting in the widening reading achievement gap among racial and ethnic groups, English language learners, disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students (Gambrell et al., 2011; National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2013). As previously stated, no significant advances in reading proficiency have been made since 1992 as demonstrated by the fact that only one third of U.S children read at the proficiency level according to data gathered in that year; and according to an NAEP 2013 report, only one third of U.S. children are reading at the proficiency level in this decade. Additionally, Allington (2012) speculated that the accountability movement has been unsuccessful as evidenced by the widened gap between specific subgroups.

Recent statistics reflect an approximation of ten million students currently experiencing reading difficulties in upper elementary and secondary grades, with an average of 66% of all U.S. fourth-graders and 64% of all eighth-graders reading below the basic level (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Moreover, 86% of economically disadvantaged students read below the basic proficient level. Juel (1988) expressed that children who do not develop adequate literacy skills at a young age are far more likely to struggle in all content areas throughout their academic years, and "it is time intensive and expensive to remediate their difficulties" (Zumeta, Comptom, & Fuchs, 2012, p. 201).

Historical Account of Literacy Instruction

Given the numerous studies and scholarly articles published on the topic of literacy instruction over the past few decades, it may appear that no two educators agree on the most effective or ineffective methods of teaching children to read. In fact, scholarly findings on the subject of literacy have often been inconclusive or contradictory in terms of the superiority of a particular method or approach (Bond & Dykstra, 1966/1997; Chall, 1983). Likewise, nearly every basic component associated with literacy has been intensely debated by laymen, educators, and scholars, each claiming validity on scientific grounds (Chall, 1983).

The Reading Wars

Historical accounts confirm that the pedagogical aspects associated with literacy instruction evolved through innumerable changes following the 1820s. More specifically, reading methodology at the primary level transitioned from a synthetic (part to whole) phonics approach to a sight-word (also referred to as whole-word or look-say) approach, with the latter becoming the traditional method during the early 1900s (Pearson, 2000). According to Pearson (2000) the sight-word system was followed by the development of an alphabetic instructional approach designed to help beginning readers associate letter sounds with corresponding illustrations. The meaning and understanding instructional approach promoted by Parker and Farnham appeared in sentence and story method readers (Barry, 2008). The sentence method required the teacher to introduce a story one sentence at time through initial questioning relative to the corresponding picture, followed by a whole-to-part technique in which "sentences were examined by words (apple, see, etc.), and then words were examined by letters (a, s, etc.)"

(Barry, 2008, p.41). The story method design, explained Barry (2008), required memorization and recitation by the children of a repetitive story or poem prior to seeing it in print.

A shift from elocution to silent reading emerged in the late 1800s as experts determined through experimental investigation that silent reading more effectively enhanced comprehension. Basal readers were also redesigned beginning in the early 1900s to reflect realistic stories with scientifically controlled vocabulary (Mavrogenes, 1985). The 1940s *Dick and Jane* basal series incorporated a whole-word approach that became the predominant and accepted modality of literacy instruction in the U.S. but would later become a central focal point in the national scrutiny of beginning reading instructional practices (Chall, 1983).

Beginning in the early 1930s, and continuing into the 1960s, the sight-word approach to reading instruction was emphasized in elementary classrooms in the U.S.; however, Chall (1983) explained that the controversial 1955 publication of Rudolf Flesch's *Why Johnny Can't Read* "took the nation by storm" when Flesch unapologetically attacked the predominant pedagogical views on the whole-word method of reading instruction while advocating a return to a phonics-based approach (p.3). Flesch's work took on a political dimension thought to be irrelevant to the discussion on reading instruction, as he pointed to a connection between phonics and democracy, and challenged the motives and intellect of experts, basal companies, and schools (Adams, 1990). According to Flesch (1955) the word method was a conspiracy that interfered with the inalienable right to equal opportunity and was designed to further advance the privileges of the upper middle class:

> It seems to me a plain fact that the word method consists essentially of treating children as if they were dogs. It is not a method of teaching at all; it is clearly a method of animal training. It's the most inhuman, mean, stupid way of foisting something on a child's mind. (p. 126)

Although this popular book remained on the best seller list for more than 30 weeks, the work generated widespread criticism (Chall, 1983). Thus, the debate continued years later when support for Flesch's stance on reading methodology appeared in later educational publications.

As the whole-word method continued to dominate beginning literacy instruction in the primary grades up through the mid-1960s, a pivotal point in the history of reading emerged as documented in Chall's research. Chall (1983) began the reading debates in 1967 by posing the question of whether children learn better through a meaning-emphasis approach or a code-emphasis approach. In pursuit of answers, she conducted interviews, observed in classrooms, and analyzed various basal programs (Snow et al., 1998). According to Pressley and Allington (2014), Chall concluded that a code-emphasis (or skills-emphasis) approach to reading instruction produced greater results than a meaning-emphasis approach; however, she cautioned that a skills-emphasis approach cannot ensure the reading success of all children. As a result of her work, Chall (1983) developed the following eight principles of reading instruction:

1. The reading process should include comprehension, application, appreciation, and recognition of words.

2. The child should begin with the silent reading of meaningful stories that reflect his or her own interests and experiences.

3. Phonics instruction should begin after the child learns to recognize approximately 50 or more sight words; however, the child should first be encouraged to utilize context and picture cues to identify unknown words.

4. Phonics instruction should begin in first grade and be spread out over six years.

5. Phonics should be taught through a process of contextual integration and not in isolation.

6. Children in grades 1-3 should begin with a controlled and repetitive vocabulary until mastery is attained.

7. Children should begin reading instruction slowly in first grade; however, those deemed not developmentally ready to begin should continue with reading readiness experiences.

8. Children should be taught in small groups based upon reading ability.

One important finding from Chall's study was that although the synthetic phonics approach (teaching letter-sound associations) produced remarkable achievement for all students, the advantage was considerably pronounced for lower-achieving students (Pressley et al., 2001). These scholars further conceded that Chall's 1967 landmark publication was influential in contributing to the downfall of the *Dick and Jane* whole-word era. Another study relative to Chall's work that contributed to the transformation of reading programs was the 1966 *USOE First Grade Cooperative Reading Studies* (Chall, 1983). The Coordinating Center found that basal reading programs implemented in conjunction with a separate phonics program produced greater achievement results in first and second grades as compared to a whole-word or meaning-emphasis approach, thus further discrediting the *Dick and Jane* whole-word approach (Chall, 1983; Pressley, Allington, Wharton-McDonald, Block, & Morrow 2001). Following a reevaluation of the data, Dykstra (1966/1997) concluded, "…Early systematic instruction in phonics provides the child with the skills necessary to become an independent reader at an early age than is likely if phonics instruction is delayed and less systematic (p.397)." In addition, the *First Grade Studies* concluded that no single method produced superior results; but it was, in fact, the teacher, who makes a significant impact on reading achievement (Bond & Dykstra, 1966/1997; Pressley et al., 2001).

As a result of *The First Grade Studies* and *Learning to Read: The Great Debate,* textbook companies began restructuring basal readers by integrating phonics instruction into their programs. Likewise, television programming such as *Sesame Street* and *The Electric Company* produced by the Children's Television Workshop helped to legitimize phonics by accepting a decoding methodology as a focus for beginning literacy instruction (Carroll & Chall, 1975;

Chall, 1983). In a subsequent publication entitled *Toward a Literate Society* (1975)*,* The

Committee on Reading of the National Institute of Education (NIE) warned against inflexibility

and emphasized a balanced instructional approach including a full range of skills to enhance

reading growth in children (Carroll & Chall, 1975; Kim, 2008). The Committee proposed that

because literacy was essential to achieving full participation in a modern society, it should be

part of national educational goals:

> Merely to know that there are some millions of our citizens who cannot read, or who as
> schoolchildren are not learning to read to a level sufficient to satisfy their personal needs,
> and who are thereby precluded from full participation in our society, should make us
> pause to wonder why this is so and to speculate on what could be done to remedy this
> tragic situation. (Carroll & Chall, 1975, p.6)

<center>The Whole Language Movement</center>

The basal continued to be the main ingredient in classroom reading instruction, which

emphasized the use of workbooks and skills-based lessons throughout the 1970s (Ravitch, 2000).

However, a dependence on workbooks created an overemphasis on skill-based instruction, which

then instigated a progression toward the incorporation of a meaning-based learning through the

use of authentic texts and children's literature (Barry, 2008). This movement, referred to as

whole language, emerged in the 1980s and ironically gained momentum through the one

instructional mechanism it most strongly opposed—the basal (Pearson, 2000).

During the 1980s with the emergence of the 1985 release of *Becoming a Nation of*

Readers (1985), a second publication of the National Institute of Education, the basal reading

companies once again began the redesign process to reflect shifting instructional changes to

beginning reading methodology. In its report, the NIE challenged researchers to shift their

inquiry by examining varied approaches to reading instruction beyond phonics and early literacy,

to a more comprehensive focus on the acquisition of language and comprehension at the

<center>32</center>

elementary level (Kim, 2008; Stahl, 1999). Adams (1990) made a strong case for phonics instruction by citing the extant data. She concluded that the acquisition of a prereading skill in which children develop an awareness that words consist of blended sounds (i.e., phonemic awareness) would reduce the incidences of later reading failure.

A paradigm shift in pedagogy emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s that embodied a language-based approach in place of phonics and basal reading programs. Although inspiration for the whole language movement originated with John Dewey, explained Stahl (1999), the development of whole language can be traced to Goodman and Goodman (1979) who suggested that children learn best when language is used for authentic purposes. Thus, according to Goodman and Goodman (1979) learning to read and write should be a natural process developed within a literacy-rich, child-centered environment. Stahl (1999) also pointed out that it was during this timeframe that skill-based tasks, such as phonics, were replaced with an immersion in literature-based activities. Barry (2008) further suggested that the whole language movement took on a political dimension in 1988 when the California state superintendent called for a shift from skills-based instruction to literature-based instruction; however, the focus reverted back to phonics following a notable decline in test scores as reported by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in 1992 and 1994. Consequently, the state was cast into the national spotlight as speculation grew that the decline was directly related to whole language. Stahl (1999) further expounded on the movement by noting that although the whole language era achieved some measure of success in its campaign to improve children's interest and motivation toward reading, word recognition and comprehension skills were diminished in the process.

A Return to the Basics

Conflicting perspectives regarding whole language and phonics-based instruction persisted through the 1980s and 1990s as the quest for the best instructional method for teaching reading continued. In conjunction, it was during the onset of the late 1990s that a report was issued entitled *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children* sponsored by the National Research Council (NRC). The U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services requested that the National Academy of Sciences form a committee to research proactive intervention strategies for preventing reading difficulties in at-risk children (Snow et al., 1998). The convergent findings of the NRC report underscored the need for a balance of evidence-based literacy approaches as essential to a child's reading progress:

Adequate initial reading instruction requires that children:

- use reading to obtain meaning from print,
- have frequent and intensive opportunities to read,
- be exposed to frequent, regular spelling-sound relationships,
- learn about the nature of the alphabetic writing system, and
- understand the structure of spoken words. (Snow et al., 1998, p.3)

The committee advocated delivery of high-quality pedagogy during the kindergarten and primary grades as the greatest line of defense for preventing reading difficulties in the later grades (Snow et al., 1998). In concert with an emphasis on improving instructional delivery, the NRC stressed the importance of school-wide organizational reform in the development of effective reading skills. The NRC further suggested that improving literacy instruction be the first priority of educational research (Taylor, Pressley, & Pearson, 2002).

According to Snow et al. (1998), the acquisition of higher literacy skills is essential in a society in which the technological demands continue to grow, "creating grievous consequences for those who fall short" (p.1). In 1997, Congress asked The National Institute of Health and Human Development (NICHD) to appoint a committee of experts to research effective reading practices (Barry, 2008; Snow et al., 1998). Working in cooperation with the recommendations of the National Research Council, the committee of 14 chosen for the task identified and analyzed approximately 100,000 research-based studies that were experimental in design and then constructed their report based upon their findings (Barry, 2008). As a result, the committee (National Reading Panel, 2000) published the *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction*. The report concluded that a synthesis of instructional components is central to the development of literacy programming in connection with phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, guided oral reading, and comprehension. In addition, the panel recommended continued teacher educational opportunities and the integration of technology in the classroom as a resource essential to the development of students' literacy skills. The findings of the National Reading Panel (2000) were highlighted in the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001.

Reading First

The findings of the NRP report were influential in determining the goals of the *Reading First* grant, a component of the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001. The *Reading First* initiative was instituted to address the needs of students enrolled in high-poverty Title I schools by

providing evidenced-based resources and services to ensure that all students reach or exceed

grade-level proficiency in reading by the end of their third-grade year (Allington, 2012; Kim,

2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Further, practitioners were encouraged to

incorporate a broad range of evidenced-based instructional strategies in tandem with the five

pillars of reading instruction identified by the NRP (Kim, 2008). Specific to Virginia, teachers

from schools that received *Reading First* funds were required to attend professional development

training through the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education. However, despite

training and implementation of these methods, Ashby, Burns, and Royle (2014) argued that

while *Reading First* instruction resulted in significant gains for some populations after the first

few years, limited evidence exists that the achievement gap was reduced between children from

economically disadvantaged families.

<u>Response to Intervention</u>

Response to Intervention (*RTI*) was instituted as part of the reauthorization of the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in an effort to decrease the number of

students identified as having a specific learning disability (Allington, 2012). The *RTI* framework

consists of a comprehensive assessment and intervention plan used to identify and remediate

individual student difficulties before proceeding with the special education referral process (U.S.

Department of Education, 2007). In alignment with *RTI*, students receive individualized,

research-based interventions specific to their academic weaknesses through a three-tiered

instructional model. General education teachers and staff must use progress monitoring tools to

assess a student's level of growth as a result of the individualized evidenced-based instruction.

Following the implementation and assessment of the specified interventions, a student may be

referred for further testing if no adequate progress results. The Virginia Department of

Education (2007) outlined the three-tiered model as follows:

- Tier 1: All students are provided evidenced-based instruction delivered by the general education teacher as part of the core curriculum.

- Tier 2: Students not making adequate progress from the core curriculum receive targeted intervention in a small-group setting in addition to the core instruction.

- Tier 3: Students continuing to make inadequate progress based upon assessment results are provided individualized intervention (Virginia Department of Education, 2007).

Wanzek, Roberts, Otaiba, and Kent (2014) suggested that the effectiveness of the core

instruction is a critical element to accurately identifying students who have significant learning

difficulties that are not the result of ineffective instruction. Allington (2012) noted that *RTI*

regulations now include a plan for providing instruction to struggling readers and a separate plan

for identifying students with disabilities. In addition, school districts may now allocate 15% of

their appropriated special education funding for *RTI* purposes.

<u>Teacher Quality</u>

Relevant research has confirmed that improving school and teacher quality is the most

significant factor in raising student achievement (Allington, 2012; Anderson et al., 1985;

Darling-Hammond, 1996; Marzano et al., 2001; Pressley et al., 2001; Sanders & Rivers, 1996;

Stronge, 2011; Taylor et al., 2002). Although studies specify that no single program or method

has been shown to be superior in increasing student proficiency rates, Barber and Mourshed

(2007) suggested that students under the tutelage of teachers with high student achievement

outcomes, no matter their initial proficiency levels, progressed at three times the rate as students

placed with teachers with low student achievement outcomes. Mendro, Jordan, and Bembray

(1998) found that students who received 3 consecutive years of high quality instruction made

40% larger gains than students who received low quality instruction for 3 consecutive years (as cited in Stronge, 2011). Allington and Johnson (2000) further expanded on these findings by determining that "exemplary" teachers' students achieved literacy levels that are "beyond the most sophisticated standardized tests" (p.20). Stronge (2011) proposed it is the teacher who offers the greatest hope for increasing student achievement. However, it is noteworthy that although there is support for this conjecture among researchers, a lack of consensus remains regarding which features of instructional practices contribute to academic success:

> Interventions at the structural, home, policy, or school level is like searching for your wallet which you lost in your bushes, under the lamppost because that is where there is light. The answer lies elsewhere—it lies in the person who gently closes the classroom door and performs the teaching act—the person who puts into place the end effects of so many policies, who interprets these policies, and who is alone with students during their 15,000 hours of schooling. (Hattie, 2003, pp. 2-3)

Literacy and Reading Defined

The terms "literacy" and "reading" have traditionally been used interchangeably by scholars in reference to the topic under study. The term "reading" refers to a complex cognitive process in which the reader attempts to construct meaning from text; a process in which the reader must integrate the contextual information based upon prior knowledge to produce conceptual understanding (Anderson et al., 1985; Cooper et al., 2012; Pressley, 1998). Reading is further defined as a process in which the reader interacts with the text using prior knowledge and experience to acquire a store of new information, comprehend arguments, and glean main ideas from sources (Carter, 1997). Cooper et al. (2012) described literacy as encompassing reading, writing, listening, thinking, speaking and learning. These scholars further expanded upon this concept by pointing out that reading involves the function of two distinct processes: decoding and comprehension. Although an inexhaustible body of literature encompasses the

research on reading and literacy, experts have failed to agree on a single definition (Murphy, 2004); however, Anderson et al. (1985) made this comparison:

> Reading can be compared to the performance of a symphony orchestra…like the performance of a symphony, reading is a holistic act. In other words, while reading can be analyzed into subskills such as discriminating letters and identifying words, performing the subskills one at a time does not constitute reading. Reading can be said to take place only when the parts are put together in a smooth integrated performance. (p.7)

Success in reading, like learning to play a musical instrument, is acquired through repeated practice and is interpreted in accordance with the "background of the reader, purpose for reading, and context in which the reading occurs" (Anderson et al., 1985, p.7).

Literacy Instruction

Literacy instruction typically begins in the early grades, thus, placing the responsibility of ensuring that all children develop good reading skills upon the primary teachers (Mathes et al., 2010). However, Adams (1990) pointed out that one in three children experience difficulties in learning to read. Snow et al. (1998) perpetuated these findings by stressing that high quality literacy instruction in the primary grades is the greatest defense for preventing reading failure. Consequently, early screening and progress monitoring are critical steps in preventing reading difficulties by identifying students in need of intervention (Zumeta et al., 2012). If high quality instructional practices are not implemented during these critical years, it seems likely that the inequities between students will remain and may eventually be compounded (Snow et al., 1998).

Although it is suggestive that no single instructional method or program has proved successful with all children, a positive correlation with respect to 10 evidence-based reading practices has been documented and accepted by literacy experts (Gambrell et al., 2011). These

formulated guideposts encompass a comprehensive view of the reading and writing experiences applicable to successful literacy achievement measures:

1. Promote a classroom and school-wide culture that fosters intrinsically-motivated reading by offering a print-rich literacy environment, opportunities for students to interact socially, and opportunities for choice.

2. Design authentic literacy activities meaningful and applicable to real life and that are pleasurable and informative to students.

3. Promote reading proficiency through the provision of scaffolded and explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

4. Provide students with ample opportunities for self-selected independent reading time.

5. Include a varied selection of high-quality literature encompassing multiple genres.

6. Use a variety of texts that build upon students' background knowledge, promote vocabulary development, and link common concepts.

7. Build a community of learners through collaboration within the context of the classroom.

8. Facilitate a balanced approach to student- and teacher-led text discussions.

9. Integrate technologically enhanced instruction.

10. Differentiate instruction through a wide array of appropriate assessments.

In conjunction with the 10 strategic classroom practices suggested by Gambrell et al. (2011), further recommendations included an integration of differentiated instruction in whole-group, small-group and individualized settings that is frequently assessed and customized to meet individual student needs. Nonetheless, Gambrell et al. (2011) concluded:

Optimal literacy teaching and learning can only be achieved when skillful, knowledgeable, and dedicated teachers are given the freedom and latitude to use their professional judgment to make instructional decisions that enable students to achieve their full literacy potential. (p.29)

Literacy Components

According to the National Reading Panel's (2000) *Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read: An Evidence-Based Assessment of the Scientific Research Literature on Reading and Its Implications for Reading Instruction,* a synthesis of instructional components is central to the development of evidenced-based literacy programming in connection with phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. In addition, the panel recommended continued teacher professional development opportunities and the integration of technology in the classroom as essential to the development of students' literacy skills. Each of the evidenced-based components is discussed in the following sections. Prerequisite literacy skills concept of print and concept of word are also included in the discussion.

Concept of Print

Essential to the emergent reader stage is the transitional process of concept of print, a foundational skill that emphasizes an awareness of the basic aspects of language, including the concept that letters make words while words and pictures have meaning (Morrow, Tracey, & Del Nero, 2011). Acquisition of this prerequisite skill requires emergent readers to develop an understanding of basic contextual elements including title, author, and illustrator, as well as demonstrate an interest in books by participating in activities that provide opportunities for listening, discussing and retelling stories. Also central to the development of concept of print is an awareness of the left-to-right and top-to-bottom text progression, and an understanding of purposeful reading. Morrow et al. (2011) explained that concept of print is not a natural process and, therefore, must be acquired through explicit instruction. One strategy that fosters this stage in the reading process is repetition, as demonstrated by the repetitive nature of the book *Brown*

Bear, *Brown Bear* by Carl and Martin (2011). Further, McGee and Morrow (2005) found that repeated readings results in a more sophisticated level of questioning and discussion in children.

Concept of Word

Concept of word has been defined as the "culmination of a student's automatic knowledge of letter sounds, the ability to isolate beginning consonant sounds, and their ability to remember words in isolation that were viewed previously in text" (Blackwell-Bullock, Invernizzi, Drake & Howell, 2009, p.30). According to literacy experts Bear, Negrete, and Cathey (2012) concept of word is a critical developmental literacy skill—"a watershed event in reading" in which children transition from the oral to the written language phase (p.1). These scholars argued that profound implications are imminent for children who do not develop concept of word as they may experience complexities in acquiring an adequate phonics and sight-word base. Bear et al. (2012) further suggested that concept of word must be taught explicitly through activities that foster the skill; for example, engaging children in one-to-one correspondence exercises in pointing to printed words and phrases within contextual structures, and providing guided as well as choral and partner reading opportunities. In addition, engaging children in phrasal prosody through singing, rhythmic songs, stories and poems; exposing them to rhythmic and memorable language; and clapping and tapping of syllables may also be beneficial in augmenting the acquisition of this fundamental skill.

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness has been defined as the ability to understand that words are made up of different sounds (Cooper et al., 2012; Morrow et al., 2011). The term has been further

42

described as the conceptual framework on which reading is built, essential to the development of

the alphabetic principal, word recognition and inventive spelling (Stahl, 1997). The National

Reading Panel (2000) reported that because phonemic awareness is a prerequisite to learning

phonics, engaging students in activities to promote the development of this skill is vital to future

reading and spelling success. Labbo and Teale (1997) suggested that phonemic awareness can

be developed and fostered by implementing a wide array of engaging activities that include, but

are not limited to, riddles, rhymes, poetry, chants, alliteration, puns, tongue twisters, and

clapping syllables. In addition, explicit instruction in manipulating phonemes—blending and

segmenting parts in words—is an alternative strategy for enhancing phonemic awareness.

Adams (1990) found that a group of students who received instruction in phonemic

awareness was well ahead of the group who did not receive exposure to phonemic awareness

activities. Some scholars have asserted that the acquisition of this skill is a predictor of future

reading success, IQ measures, and vocabulary attainment (Snow et al., 1998; Stahl, 1997). In

alignment with these findings, Pressley and Allington (2014) presented research demonstrating

that kindergarteners who lack phonemic awareness will likely experience future difficulties with

reading success (e.g., Adams, 1990; Blackman, 2000; Pennington, Groisser & Welsh, 1993;

Stanovich, 1986, 1988). Snow and Juel (2005) concluded that instruction in alphabetic coding at

the beginning reader stage is beneficial to all children, essential for some, and detrimental to

none.

Phonics

Phonics has been defined as "The study of the relationships between the speech sounds

(phonemes) and the letters (graphemes) that represents them" (Cooper et al., 2012, p. 487). A

strong body of research indicates that beginning readers benefit from explicit phonics instruction (Adams, 1990; Anderson et al., 1985; Chall, 1983; Cooper et al., 2012; National Reading Panel, 2000; Snow et al., 1998). The goal of phonics instruction is to help children learn the alphabetic principal, or the relationships between letters and spoken words:

> Overall, when you start to review the data seriously, you can't seem to get away from the fact that there is something about phonics and decoding that is very, very important…. You cannot get away from a consideration of decoding as a central focus of beginning reading instruction. (Williams, p. 16, as cited in Murphy, 2004, p. 103)

Murphy (2004) purported that phonics is a basic skill connected with the acquisition of word identification that provides a framework for comprehension; however, Stahl (1992) argued that comprehension is inhibited if too much time is devoted to decoding words. Conversely, automaticity in decoding and word recognition affords the reader a greater capacity to construct meaning from text, argued Murphy (2004).

Additional researchers have discussed the importance of explicit and systematic reading instruction that includes opportunities for struggling and beginning readers to develop decoding (Pullen, Lane, Lloyd, Nowak, & Ryals, 2005). Williams (as cited in Murphy, 2004) further contended that students, particularly those with reading difficulties, who have not achieved mastery in phonics and decoding skills will likely experience a limited reading vocabulary, impaired comprehension, and achieve less fluency and automaticity. Armbruster, Lehr, Osborne, and Adler (2001) concluded, "Systematic and explicit phonics instruction makes a bigger contribution to children's growth in reading than instruction that provides non-systematic or no phonics instruction" (p.13). These researchers further noted that phonics-based reading instruction is especially beneficial to the growth of kindergarten and first-grade students. Nevertheless, Adams (1990) warned against teaching skills in isolation and advocated an

instructional approach that maintains a balance between skills and meaning as the most impactful for fostering reading success.

<div align="center">Vocabulary</div>

Researchers have identified four types of vocabulary: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Armbruster et al., 2001). Children acquire vocabulary directly and indirectly when they hear and see words used in a variety of contexts ranging from conversations, reading, and explicit instruction. Vocabulary development is essential to reading success and can be fostered through oral language or within the context of written language; however, research has suggested that, depending upon their prior knowledge of the topic, children must encounter an unknown word at least seven times in order for the word to be learned within context (Pressley & Allington, 2014).

According to Allington (2006) "wide independent reading has been shown to be the most critical factor in acquiring new word meanings" (p.123). Conversely, the subsequent research of Pressley and Allington (2014) revealed that when children attempt to derive the meanings of unfamiliar words in context, they often misinterpret them due to either poor prior knowledge or weak contextual clues within the text. Although reading widely is important, studies indicate that only 10 to 15 of every 100 new words encountered will be learned in context solely as a result of contextual inference, as little prior knowledge creates an inability to derive contextual support for determining the meaning of words (Allington, 2006).

In further connection with reading development, teaching common word parts including affixes, base words, and root words can accelerate vocabulary growth by helping children learn the meanings of multiple unknown words (Adams, 1990; Armbruster et al., 2001; Cunningham, 2009; Marzano, 2004). Adams likewise recommended teaching word parts by common meaning

(for example, duce: adduce, educe, induce, produce, etc.) to increase vocabulary and

comprehension skills (p.151). Within this instructional framework, some scholars have stressed

that because word study is developmental, it is essential to differentiate and scaffold instruction

in alignment with the various levels of knowledge and understanding of words (Bear, Invernizzi,

Templeton, & Johnston, 2012).

Deciding which words to teach can prove challenging for teachers who want to teach

their students new vocabulary while simultaneously accessing prior knowledge to do so. Beck,

McKeown, and Kucan (2002) and Allington (2012) proposed that most children are already

familiar with a cluster of approximately 8,000 high-frequency words; therefore, they

recommended explicitly teaching a second cluster of 8,000 high-frequency words that are

specific to adult conversations and appear frequently in texts. In addition, Marzano (2004)

proposed that children learn words more readily when provided meanings in everyday language

rather than through formalized dictionary definitions.

Although there are numerous strategies and resources for teaching vocabulary, clustering

is an example of a technique that involves activities such as grouping related terms through

brainstorming, labeling, and developing concept maps, graphs, charts, and webs that represent

how the words are connected (Blachowicz & Fisher, 2011). Blachowicz and Fisher further

stressed the importance of engaging students in discussion, sharing, feedback, and scaffolding to

increase word learning. In addition, Marzano (2004) outlined eight evidenced-based strategies

for direct vocabulary instruction:

1. Provide students with descriptions of words using everyday language rather than definitions.

2. Present words using linguistic and nonlinguistic representations.

3. Gradually shape the meanings of words through repeated exposure.

46

4. Teach students roots, base words, and affixes.

5. Organize words into categories by sematic features (e.g., setting, typical uses, physical characteristics, etc.).

6. Allow students to interact with words through discussion.

7. Incorporate vocabulary games into instruction.

8. Focus on content specific terms (p.90).

Research has furthermore established a strong connection between vocabulary development and reading comprehension (Cooper & Kiger, 2003). Marzano (2004) proposed that direct vocabulary instruction has an impressive track record of improving students' background knowledge and the comprehension of academic content. He extended the research by suggesting that teaching content-specific vocabulary increases comprehension by 33%, compared to a 12% increase in comprehension when vocabulary instruction is limited to high-frequency word lists. The National Reading Panel (2000) suggested that "reading comprehension is a complex, cognitive process that cannot be understood without a clear description of the role that vocabulary development and vocabulary instruction play in the understanding of what has been read" (p.13).

Comprehension

Cooper et al. (2012) have defined comprehension as "the process of constructing meaning by interacting with the text" (p.12). Meaning is constructed when readers are able to make connections between what they already know and what they are reading (McLaughlin, 2012); thus, readers are more likely to comprehend what they are reading when adequate prior knowledge exists (Pardo, 2004). Pardo explained that through the schematic process, individuals

organize and categorize information that has been stored into long-term memory, thus making the information easier to retrieve and allowing readers to more readily access information in connection with the text to create meaning. Pardo (2004) further noted that when inadequate student background knowledge is evident, teachers should help to build the knowledge though a variety of strategies such as incorporating informational texts across content areas and genres, using graphic organizers, and teaching students to connect text to self, the world, and other texts. Although studies specify that explicit strategy instruction is beneficial to enhancing students' comprehension (McLaughlin, 2012) and helps them to become independent readers as they navigate through various texts (Clark & Graves, 2005), some literacy experts caution that strategy instruction in isolation can hinder processing speed and inhibit the pleasure of reading (Johnson & Keier, 2010).

Explicit instruction involves a multistep, scaffolding process in which the teacher provides a great deal of student support in the early stages, followed by a gradual release of responsibility (McLaughlin, 2012). Clark and Graves (2005) reported that scaffolding is one of the most necessary techniques essential to enhancing comprehension. The precept behind scaffolding is that students are given the opportunity to learn complex tasks in manageable chunks. According to Marzano and Toth (2014) teachers should not only teach for understanding, but "scaffold their instruction from facts and details to robust generalizations and processes…As part of this clear progression of learning, students need more opportunities to apply their knowledge and make inferences based on what they are learning" (p.16). Marzono and Toth (2014) further maintained that students will likely only gain surface-level knowledge if not given opportunities to struggle with concepts, and be unable to apply their knowledge and build the necessary stamina for the mental challenge of implicit high-level thinking.

Although research has not identified a single set of evidenced-based strategies that are most effective in increasing comprehension, it does support the idea that there are a wide array of approaches for helping children construct meaning and build critical thinking skills (Cooper et al., 2012; National Reading Panel, 2000). One example is the Guided Comprehension Process in which students learn to use strategies in multiple settings and through a variety of texts, including the following:

1. Previewing the text, making predications, setting a purpose for reading, and building background knowledge

2. Engaging in self-questioning prior to, and while reading the text

3. Connecting the text to self, world, and other texts

4. Visualizing pictures or scenes while reading

5. Understanding how words work

6. Self-monitoring by asking "Does this make sense?" and making appropriate adjustments

7. Summarizing

8. Evaluating the text (McLaughlin, 2012).

In alignment with this, Cooper et al. (2012) discussed key strategies that when taught explicitly may enhance student comprehension: "visualizing, making connections, monitoring, inferencing, identifying important information, generating and answering questions, summarizing and synthesizing, and evaluating" (p. 364). Other examples of instructional frameworks that improve comprehension are Questioning the Author (QtA), Scaffolded Reading Experience (SRE), and Question Answer Relationships (QAR). Examples of evidenced-based comprehension strategies are Reciprocal Teaching (RT) and Direct Explanation of Teaching Strategies (DECS).

According to Walczyk and Griffith-Ross (2007) comprehension problems may exist as a result of difficulties with processing spoken language. The Compensatory-Encoding Theory (C-ET) explains how students with weak reading skills can overcome these difficulties and significantly improve comprehension through compensatory strategies. Outlined below, these strategies can be beneficial when struggling readers experience confusions related to poor verbal working memory or uncertainty about contextual meaning:

1. *Slowing Reading Rate*. Allowing students to read at their own pace can help prevent confusions and adjust rate for more difficult texts.

2. *Pause*. Pausing allows readers to correct a confusion or select an alternate compensatory strategy.

3. *Look Back*. Looking back at the text previously read allows the reader to restore forgotten information.

4. *Read Aloud*. Research indicates that reading aloud positively impacts comprehension by helping readers focus on the text, drown out distractions, allow for prosody, and provide auditory feedback.

5. *Sounding Out*, *Analogizing to Known Sight Words, or Contextual Guessing*. These strategies can be useful when automatic word reading fails.

6. *Jump Over*. Readers can jump over words that are unfamiliar, take too much time to process, or do not impact meaning.

7. *Reread Text*. Rereading can increase comprehension, fluency, and resolve confusions. (pp. 561-562)

In addition, Waczyk and Griffith-Ross (2007) noted that fluent readers with weak comprehension skills (also referred to as "word callers") may not be cognitively engaged or may be reading words outside their listening vocabularies. "Word callers" may benefit, for instance, from such strategies as reading more challenging, less challenging, or more interesting texts to help them stay engaged; creating mental images as they read and connecting the images to prior knowledge; reading and discussing texts in cooperative learning groups to increase mental

50

engagement; and increasing their reading choices (Waczyk & Griffith-Ross, 2007).

Literacy experts have stressed that students benefit from teacher modeling of comprehension strategies coupled with multiple opportunities to apply the strategies (Allington, 2012; Harvey & Goudvis, 2013). Harvey and Goudvis contended that students can more efficiently construct meaning and more fully participate in dialogue and classroom discussions when they possess a repertoire of necessary strategies. As further stated by Harvey and Goudvis, "to meet the challenges of an increasingly complex world, we teach comprehension strategies so our students can turn information into knowledge and actively use it" (p.433).

<u>Fluency</u>

Word reading fluency was defined by Cooper et al. (2012) as, "In reading, the ability to read words of connected text smoothly and without significant word recognition problems" (p.509). Fluent readers are able to recognize the majority of words in a text effortlessly and with automaticity (Kuhn & Rasinski, 2011), thus expending their cognitive processes on constructing meaning (Beers, 2003). Less fluent readers, says Beers (2003), read slowly, pause frequently, make mistakes, ignore punctuation, and read in a monotone voice. Walczyk and Griffith-Ross (2007) suggested that inefficient reading skills can negatively impact comprehension if too much time and attention is devoted to word reading, thus inhibiting higher-level comprehension; however, repeated practice can improve automatic word recognition and result in improved comprehension. Conversely, Walczyk and Griffith-Ross (2007) presented evidence that approximately 10% to 15% of comprehension problems in children are not the result of poor fluency skills but may be the result of deficiencies in understanding spoken language or other deficits. In their research they found that a number of fluent readers possessed low

51

comprehension skills due to weak vocabulary skills, low cognitive engagement, or lack of compensatory skills. In contrast, they found that a number of low-fluency readers comprehended well when compensatory strategies were used, thus indicating a weak correlation between word fluency and comprehension. However, Rasinksi (2012) argued that fluency is an essential pillar of reading instruction and suggested that the problem lies in the fact that fluency has come to be viewed as a "quest for speed" rather than "reading with and for meaning" (p.516). Rasinski further asserted that comprehension is reduced when readers deplete their cognitive energies on word recognition and suggested that practicing prosody, rereading texts, and reading widely are fundamental to increasing fluency and enhancing comprehension.

Rasinski (2012) recommended four strategies for increasing fluency skills: First, the teacher models reading the selected text with fluency and expression. Next, the teacher provides support as the students read the same text out loud, independently, chorally, paired with a partner, or along with a recording. Third, the teacher helps the students focus on reading with expression by bringing attention to meaningful phrases. Finally, students are provided multiple opportunities to practice their reading. Similarly, Beers (2003) suggested the following strategies for improving fluency: repeated exposure to high-frequency words; modeling expression, phrasing, and pacing; explicit instruction of phrasing and intonation; prompting rather than correcting; and rereading texts.

Repetition can occur by reading the same text multiple times or by reading multiple texts in a variety of contexts that contain the same words (Kuhn & Rasinski, 2011). According to Allington (2012) rereading texts also enhances higher-order comprehension skills. He provided an example of a lesson in which a group of middle school students reread texts aloud to practice

fluency and experiment with different intonation and stress.

Writing

Although not included in the components recommended by the National Reading Panel (2000), writing is an integral part of literacy instruction. Moreover, Cooper et al. (2012) suggested that reading and writing share similarities in the constructive process and, when taught together, improve achievement, foster development of critical thinking, and enhance communication skills. In their study of first-grade literacy instruction, Bond and Dykstra (1966/1997) concluded that programs that included writing instruction increased reading achievement with greater proportion than programs that did not. Similarly, Allington (2012) found that teachers whose students made measureable progress had students engaged in reading and writing activities for as much as half of the school day. Irwin (2007) stated, "Writing is one of the most powerful tools for developing comprehension because it can actively involve the reader in constructing a set of meanings that are useful to the individual reader" (p.30). Further, Zoch, Langston-DeMott, and Adams-Budde (2014) discussed the implications of "new literacies" by proposing that teachers and students should expand their idea of literacy by integrating digital texts into the writing process. Digital technologies, according to Zoch, Langston-DeMott, and Adams-Budde support writing development by affording students the opportunity to explore and create, thus giving them a "deeper understanding of the writing process as fluid rather than linear (p.36)"

21<u>st</u> Century Literacy

The integration of technology in the classroom has been a slow and tentative process as print continues to be the traditional mean of literacy instruction (McKenna, 2014); however, students must be proficient in the use of technology in a fast-paced world in which technology has become the primary source for communication and information. Dalton (2014) proposed that technology can engage struggling readers and enhance comprehension by offering an alternative to printed materials; for example, e-texts that can be customized to support the specific needs and interests of students. McKenna (2014) further maintained that "with adequate digital scaffolding, a student may be able to independently read a text that he or she may have found frustrating in print form" (p.11). The potential challenge for educators is that the vast amount of technology places emphasis on higher-order literacy (Allington, 2012). Allington (2012) pointed out that the Internet offers no filters or controls on information, placing a greater demand on the reader, listener, and viewer to synthesize and evaluate information from a variety of sources for accuracy and reliability. Additionally, the new national standards call for students to be global learners; therefore, incorporating and integrating technology-based literacy experiences such as digital books, websites, blogs, and iPads is necessary for reading to be relevant to contemporary students.

Conclusion

In their research of characteristics of teachers and schools that promote reading achievement, Taylor et al. (2002) suggested that the 1998 report of the National Academy of Science Committee, *Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children,* attempted to address why some schools across the United States "are attaining greater than expected reading

achievement with populations of students who are at risk for failure by virtue of poverty"

(p.362). Taylor et al. (2002) concluded:

> In the best classrooms, students are engaged much of the time in reading and writing, with the teacher monitoring student progress and encouraging continuous improvement and growth, and providing "scaffolded" instruction, in which the teacher notices when student are having difficulties and provide sufficient support so that students are able to make progress. Furthermore, the skillful instruction is based on the exact strategies students need to work on. (p. 366)

In a study of classroom literacy programs, Allington (2006) found that teachers who promoted literacy had students engaged in guided and independent reading and writing activities for as much as half of the school day, and spent more time in social studies and science reading than were found in other classrooms. In contrast, students in classrooms where literacy was not promoted were engaged approximately 10% of the day in reading and writing activities and spent more time completing worksheets or workbook pages and copying vocabulary definitions from a dictionary. Furthermore, low-achievers mainly received instruction through texts that were above their reading levels and often only received reading materials in special classes such as Title I or special education. Allington (2006) concluded that in order for students to become proficient readers they need access to an extensive supply of books they can read and a significant amount of time spent reading.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

Chapter 3 addresses the methods and procedures used to investigate and examine specific practices perceived as contributing to literacy achievement at three high-achieving elementary schools within the parameters of the Washington County Virginia Public School System. A qualitative research design was used to gain an in-depth understanding of why the instructional practices of kindergarten through through grade teachers are perceived as successful at the three schools. The study was completed through a process that included open-ended interview questions comprising building level administrators, reading specialists, and classroom teachers. The results of the study provided information for reading practitioners and administrators that could be helpful in improving reading instruction.

Qualitative Research Process

Various researchers have provided definitions and descriptions of qualitative research. Patton (2002) stated, "Qualitative data describe. They take us, as readers, into the time and place of the observation so that we know what it was like to have been there. They capture and communicate someone else's experience of the world in his or her own words. Qualitative data tell a story" (p.47). In his third edition of *Research Design*, Creswell (2008) presented this definition:

> Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures; collecting data in the participants setting; analyzing the data inductively, building from particulars to general themes; and making

interpretations of the meaning of the data. The final written report has a flexible writing structure. (p. 232)

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) further suggested that "qualitative is a type of research that refers to an in-depth study using face-to-face or observation techniques to collect data from people in their natural settings" (p.489). Consequently, the qualitative process provided the opportunity for the researcher to "actively participate" in the lives of the participants, thus, creating the opportunity for both researcher and participants to become personally acquainted (Patton, 2002).

Research Questions

Teachers' perceptions of practices that contribute to literacy achievement may vary. In order to arrive at an understanding of these perceptions at the elementary level within the parameters of the Washington County Virginia Public School District, this qualitative study was focused upon one overarching research question: What are the perceptions of kindergarten through third-grade teachers, reading specialists, and administrators about practices that contribute to literacy achievement? In addition, the following subquestions were addressed:

1. What programs and various resources do elementary educators perceive as contributing to the literacy achievement?

2. What instructional strategies do elementary educators perceive as contributing to the literacy achievement?

Grounded Theory Research Design

Grounded theory was the appropriate model for this research as its emphasis is on examining and analyzing data that emerge from the study of real-life situations as they occur in

their natural settings. Patton (2002) stated, "Qualitative inquiry is especially powerful as a source for grounded theory, theory that is inductively generated from fieldwork, that is, theory that emerges from the researcher's observations and interviews out in the real world rather than the laboratory or academy" (p.11). Patton (2002) further explained that its purpose is to build theories rather than test them. Similarly, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) suggested that the researcher seeks to formulate a hypothesis based upon the data to explain the phenomena relative to the examination of the actions of the participants. The participants, they explained, are selected on the basis of their ability to contribute to the development of the theory with respect to their philosophical views and feelings (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). Creswell (2008) further stated that the "two primary characteristics of this design are the constant comparison of data with emerging categories and theoretical sampling of different groups to maximize the similarities and the difference of information" (p. 13).

Purposeful Sample Selection

Creswell (2009) suggested that the idea behind qualitative research is to purposefully select sites, participants, and other key elements that will help the researcher better understand the research questions. Therefore, participants in this study were selected from three high-performing elementary schools within the Washington County Virginia Public School System, and included building-level administrators, reading specialists, and kindergarten through third-grade classroom teachers with experience in literacy instruction. The sample provided information-rich data that were representative of the topic of literacy practices that contribute to student achievement. Informed consent forms were signed by all participants before the study began, and demographic data were collected prior to the interviews that documented current job

assignments and years of experience. Selected schools were identified based upon the Standards

of Learning (SOL) reading achievement data reflected in the 2013-2014 Virginia School Report

Cards. The unrestricted Standards of Learning data were available on the Virginia Department

of Education Website.

It is important to note that two of the three participant schools are characterized as Title I

targeted assisted; however, the economically disadvantaged populations are 41% or higher for all

three schools. Title I funding provides financial assistance by securing personnel for preschool,

kindergarten, and Reading Recovery services. Each of the three schools receives these services

through either federal or district-level funding.

Data Collection Process

Following the strategic identification of three high-achieving elementary schools within

the Washington County Virginia Public School District and approval from the Institutional

Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix B), administrators were contacted in writing and provided

the details and description of my qualitative study. Open-ended interviews with willing

educators were scheduled and subsequently conducted for the purpose of data collection to

support this research. All participants signed an informed consent document prior to the

interview that provided a description of the purpose of the study and information regarding their

rights as participants. Patton (2002) suggested that open-ended responses provide a clearer

insight and understanding of the world as perceived by the participants, hence, questions were

designed to include a combination of knowledge and opinion in order to gain explicit insight into

successful literacy pedagogy. In totality, 18 face-to face, one-on-one interviews were conducted,

and responses were recorded and transcribed by the researcher or research assistant through the

use of technology. Verbatim quotations were captured to ensure accuracy from the interviews

that were coded and categorized through open coding according to the following:

1. Administrator perspectives

2. Classroom teacher perspectives

3. Reading specialist perspectives

4. Reading practices, strategies, programs and resources connected with student
    achievement

<u>Data Analysis</u>

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) stated that "qualitative researchers create a picture

from the pieces of information obtained (p. 323)." Accordingly, inductive reasoning is

emphasized as the researcher builds or creates hypotheses based upon the gathered data that are

inductively synthesized in order to generate findings. Avoiding predetermined hypotheses is

essential as it potentially limits data collection and analysis and could result in bias (McMillian

& Schumacher, 2010).

In order to garner information relative to the literacy practices perceived as contributing

to literacy achievement at three high-performing elementary schools located within the

Washington County Virginia School District, open-ended interview data were recorded,

organized and prepared for analysis, coded, and sorted into categories according to patterns and

themes. The data were interpreted to validate the accuracy of the information (Creswell, 2008).

An ongoing comparison of the data according to similarities and differences provided an in-

depth understanding of the of the K-3 literacy pedagogies successfully implemented at the three

high-achieving schools. The analytic coding process involved a deep immersion in the

qualitative data and resulted in the emergence of major themes and connections. Finally, the

results of the data were presented in Chapter 4.

Reliability and Validity

Qualitative validity requires the researcher to employ procedures that will ensure the

accuracy of the findings, while reliability addresses the consistency and level of generalizability

of the findings (Creswell, 2008). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) noted that "validity of

qualitative designs is the degree to which the interpretations have mutual meanings between the

participants and the research. Thus, the researcher and the participants agree on the description

or composition of events and especially on the meanings of events" (p. 330). In order to enhance

validity, McMillan and Schumacher stressed the importance of strategic data collection and

analysis techniques. With this in mind, a commitment to reliability and validity was maintained

throughout the research process.

Interview Data

An IRB approved research assistant assisted in transcribing all interviews that were

confidentially and electronically stored on a password protected computer. Interview

transcriptions were provided to all interviewees for review to ensure accuracy, and corrections

were made accordingly. Upon final verification from each interviewee, the transcriptions were

coded and categorized according to similarities and differences with regard to programs,

resources, and instructional strategies perceived as contributing to literacy achievement.

Researcher Bias

Patton (2002) suggested that qualitative study requires the researcher to be an active participant by going into the real world and immersing in the environment in an effort to gain an understanding of the perspectives of the subjects. Although he stressed the importance of neutrality, he advised that "without empathy and sympathetic introspection derived from personal encounters, the observer cannot fully understand human behavior" (p.49). Working professionally as both a former primary classroom teacher and building-level administrator could result in an unintentional bias toward various programs and literacy practices. In addition, a reading routine I developed that is currently being practiced in some classrooms within the school division could also serve as unintentional bias as a result of my own personal philosophies. In an effort to remove my personal biases from this study, a research assistant was available to help conduct interviews and provide consultation and affirmation that my own biases were absent from this study.

Ethical Considerations

It is the foremost ethical responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the rights and wellbeing of all participants are protected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Consequently, participants signed consent forms and confidentiality agreements before the study began, and pseudonyms were assigned to participants to further establish confidentiality and anonymity. In addition, verbatim transcriptions and written reports were provided to each participant for review to ensure accuracy of information and to protect their interests and wishes regarding data collection and reporting. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies, procedures, and regulations as well as strict ethical guidelines were adhered to protect the rights and welfare of

human subjects throughout the research process.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided a discussion of research methodology used in this qualitative study. The purpose of the study was to investigate and examine educators' perceptions of practices that contribute to literacy achievement. The participants were selected through purposeful sampling in order to gather the most informative information and gain an in-depth understanding of successful literacy practices in the Washington County Public School System. The research included interviews with three elementary building-level administrators, 12 kindergarten through third-grade teachers, and three reading specialists. The explicit qualitative findings from this study are presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the specific kindergarten through third grade practices perceived as contributing to literacy achievement at three high-achieving elementary schools within the Washington County Virginia Public School System. The multi-site study was completed through a process of open-ended interviews with participants comprising 12 classroom teachers, three reading specialists, and three building-level administrators. The findings from this study provided an overview and greater understanding of the similarities and differences encompassing the perspectives among the participants. Practitioners may find the information within this study useful in implementing instruction that contributes to literacy achievement.

Selection of Participants

Following a review of the Virginia School Report Card data specific to each elementary school located in the Washington County Virginia Public School System, three schools were subsequently identified as having the highest reading achievement scores for the 2013-2014 school year. Participants selected for this study included kindergarten through third-grade teachers, reading specialists, and administrators. Participants, whose experience in elementary education ranged from 3 to 35 years, were selected based upon purposeful sampling. Pseudonyms were assigned for the purpose of confidentiality. All interview statements were personal commentaries shared by the participants and used with written permission.

<center>Interview Process</center>

Interview appointments were scheduled through each building-level principal and were conducted at each school site to accommodate the participants. Eighteen face-to-face, one-to-one, open-ended interviews were recorded and transcribed by the primary researcher and the IRB-approved research assistant. An Informed Consent Form was provided to each participant at a minimum of 2 days prior to the interview for their review. The interview began with a brief discussion of the interview process and explanation of the recorder with the assurance that he or she would receive a copy of the transcription for approval and the opportunity to revise or delete comments.

<center>Interview Data</center>

Following the completion and transcribing of the interviews, I carefully reviewed and sorted the data from the transcripts according to grade level taught, administration, and reading specialists. I color coded the data in order to develop categories of similarities and differences from the participants' responses. The results of the process provided insightful and descriptive information regarding educators' perceptions of practices that contribute to literacy achievement. The Interview Data section summarizes the responses from the one-to-one, open-ended interviews. The philosophies and viewpoints of the participants relative to each interview question are represented below:

Interview Question 1

What is your personal philosophy of reading instruction? What factors influenced this philosophy?

<center>65</center>

Anna currently teaches kindergarten and has been an educator for over 6 years.

Her personal philosophy is that although strategy instruction is key, students need to understand

that the purpose for reading is to gain meaning. She stated:

> My philosophy of reading is that every student can learn to read, and I think it's very
> important for them to be able to have individualized instruction and meet them where
> they are…It is really important for them to get a firm foundation of letter identification
> and letter sound. Not only is good phonics instruction important, students also need to
> understand the purpose behind reading. We read for meaning. Students need to gain
> reading strategies that they can use when they are reading alone or without teacher
> support.

Beth is a kindergarten teacher with 13 years of experience in elementary education.

Beth's personal philosophy of reading is that every child can learn to read through a balanced

and systematic approach. She explained:

> First, the children will learn what the letters are and that those letters are symbols. The
> letters represent sounds and we put the sounds together to make words. The words go
> together to make sentences and within the sentence there is a meaning…I don't believe
> that there is just a phonics isolation approach to teaching reading or a whole language
> approach to teaching reading. I believe it is the perfect marriage between the two.

Carla has been a kindergarten teacher for 11 years and believes the process of learning

how to read should be fun. She noted:

> Reading must be fun is my philosophy. Each year I have children on every level, and no
> matter if they are just learning their letters and sounds or if they know how to read, it has
> to be fun. Later reading gets harder, more demands are placed on the students and more
> skills are needed. Whether it is striving for comprehension or whether it is just making
> the letter sounds become an actual word, I believe they have to see that it can be fun to
> read. They have to see that it is not just pointing and tracking a word, but that it can be
> an adventure. If I can show them it can be fun, then as they get older, they will continue
> to enjoy reading.

Denise has taught first grade for 10 years. Her personal philosophy is that differentiation

for each child is essential for reading success. She commented:

> My personal philosophy of instruction would be definitely working within the student's
> ability, assess their abilities and find out where they are, make sure you are using text that
> is interesting to the students, and differentiation is key when you are working with

literacy instruction. Reread often, and I personally love to write with students and then read what they have written and have them read aloud what they have written.

Emma has been an educator for 24 years and shared her belief that reading is the most important life skill. She expressed:

I think it's very important for children to understand the importance of learning to read. In our society people who are able to read have such an advantage over people who cannot read. In order to obtain almost any job in our country, a person must be able to read…I also feel it's of great importance for children to enjoy reading. Reading can open doors in a way that no other skill can. If a child can read he or she will be more successful in all other areas, like history and math.

Faith is a first grade teacher with 13 years of experience in education. She believes a child's spoken and understood vocabulary is the very beginning of reading success. She stated:

Exposure to the English language as well as to books and literature itself is crucial to a child's vocabulary development…Since gaining several years teaching experience and working closely with Mrs. King, that philosophy has grown to include much more enrichment. Seeing first-hand how much success children can experience at an early age is invigorating as a teacher. Enrichment is a key component. At a young age, children will absorb everything presented to them, good or bad. It's a teacher's job to keep filling them full of information, words, problems, situations and experiences. Only their brains know the "fill line" capacity for learning. Developmentally, children will go as far as we take them.

Gerry has been an educator for 18 years and currently teaches second grade. Regarding philosophy of reading instruction, this participant expressed that all children should be treated with respect:

I try to make sure I don't have kids feeling like that they are different than everyone else—that everyone is the same in my classroom. Everyone is treated the same and instructional expectations may be different, but the way I treat them and the perceptions I want them to have of themselves is the same. I just basically want every child to learn to read to the best of their ability.

Hannah currently teaches second grade and has enjoyed the field of education for 7 years. Hannah advocates a balanced approach to literacy instruction. Summing up her philosophy, she stated:

My personal philosophy of reading instruction is based on a balanced approach, and I was definitely influenced by the colleges that I've attended and the teacher education programs there. A balance between direct instruction in phonics and other skills and whole language—engaging the students, providing choice is extremely important in getting them hooked. You also have to deliberately teach them phonics skills, comprehension skills, and other necessary skills, and model exactly what to do to become a better reader.

Isabelle is a 35-year teacher veteran who currently teaches second grade. She discussed the importance of explicit, systematic, reading instruction. Isabelle explained:

I think it's important to use a combination of strategies such as explicit teaching of sight words, phonics, vocabulary, and comprehension. While everything we do in reading won't be exciting to every child, I think teachers should strive to include high interest materials in the instruction…I feel that skills need to be explicitly taught in an organized, sequential way. Developing a love of reading is also very important.

Jill has 10 years of experience in education and currently teaches third grade. Her philosophy includes a solid foundation of phonics instruction in conjunction with reading for meaning. She noted:

I believe reading is essential to learning—it is at the core of academic success. If students don't have a strong reading foundation I don't know how we can expect that they will be successful in school. Instructionally, I think students need to have both strong phonics instruction as well as learn to read for meaning. These are influenced by my schooling, teaching experiences, and my own personal experiences.

Katie currently teaches third grade and has 15 years of experience in education. Katie emphasized the importance of being aware of each child's starting point and areas of weakness.

She commented:

I would say that you have to take each student where they are in order to be able to look at the demographics as a whole and see wherever they are the weakest and start there, because, everybody is weak at a different point. I need to hear them read every day. The bottom quartile, and at least twice a week the entire class, read aloud just so I can get a feel for their fluency. I can pick up on comprehension issues, and, I think, we need to look at them as a community of learners.

Liza has 3 years of teaching experience in third grade. Although her experience is limited, Liza's philosophy is that one must read in order to become a better reader. She expressed:

> I would say that my first year of teaching shaped my perception of reading instruction versus the philosophy I had in college. In college you have an idea of what reading instruction will be, but then you meet the real students during your first year of teaching. My philosophy of teaching is that everyone deserves to be a reader and as a teacher you do everything possible to make them into readers. Also, you have to read to become a better reader. So, I think as a reading teacher my students should be reading as much as possible during the time I have them.

Melissa is an administrator with 19 years of experience in education who supports a balanced approach to reading. She summed up her philosophy by stating:

> Personally I feel that reading instruction has to be balanced. You have to have a strong base of phonics in the beginning and then you have to carry that over into meaning and comprehension. Fluency and vocabulary instruction are also key components that support the level of comprehension.

Nora has been an educator for 25 years and currently serves as an administrator. She emphasized the need to include the five components into the daily reading instruction. Nora explained:

> My philosophy is that reading needs to be taught thoroughly every day. It is a subject that you cannot just teach part of the aspects of it each day. Daily reading instruction must include all five pillars: phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. Students should also be given an opportunity, daily, to participate in independent silent reading. This interaction with text is invaluable. Students also benefit from hearing positive role models read text that is above their independent reading level.

Olivia has been in education for 18 years and currently serves as an administrator. She also stressed that balanced literacy instruction should include the five components. She noted:

> Quality reading instruction must include the five components of reading: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary development, and comprehension. Instruction must be a balance of these five components. Daily writing practice is also imperative to the reading success of students. My educational coursework, teaching and supervisory experiences in teaching reading have all influenced my philosophy as well as teaching my own son to read.

Patty serves as a reading specialist and has been an educator for 38 years. According to

her philosophy, learning to read is the most essential aspect of education. She commented:

> Reading is the most important component of educational instruction. I think students
> should read. I say reading because there should be no gaps in reading. It should be in
> every component of the instruction in the school and at home. There should be plenty of
> reading at home. My influence in this philosophy is my grandson who I took through
> these steps and he achieved tremendously, and he exceled in his reading beyond even my
> expectations.

Quinn has 34 years of experience as an educator and currently serves as a reading

specialist. Quinn expressed that the reading process and progress is different for every child. She

expressed:

> I think it is different for every child. We can group some of them together as far as if it is
> easy for them to learn. And, our main concern in teaching them is understanding. There
> is the group that has to be taught everything. Our main goal for them is understanding,
> but we have to go about it in a different way. We have to teach them our phonics, and all
> of that our systematic way it works. And, then, there are those that struggle so hard that
> it will take their lifetime to learn to be a reader. Not that they can't understand what is
> written down there, it is just that the decoding and encoding process is so difficult for
> them because of their brain wiring it is so difficult for them it can take a long time.

Robin has 25 years of experience as an educator and currently serves as a reading

specialist. She shared her beliefs regarding finding out what works best for every child:

> My personal philosophy of reading instruction is that all children can learn to read.
> Given the proper instruction and individualized instruction, all children are capable of
> doing so. I think that our trick in the classroom is to try to find what works for each
> individual child, and trying to find what works best. The factors that influence this
> philosophy is that I've worked with a lot of different children over many, many years in
> the classroom and now as a reading specialist. Basically, none of them learn the same
> way. They can all learn, but what approach works for one doesn't work for everyone, so
> it's a lot of trial and error along the way.

Interview Question 2

What literacy programs, resources, or strategies are currently being implemented in your

grade level or area of instruction?

Numerous resources, programs, and strategies were mentioned as being commonly implemented in the three schools; however, a theme that emerged from the interview data was a balanced approach to literacy instruction that includes a strong phonics-base or word study program in the early grades and a focus on comprehension strategies and continued word study in the upper grades. Various resources and programs mentioned as being commonly used in classrooms at these schools are, for example, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (HMH) *Journeys* basal series, RAZ Kids, the K-2 reading routine and phonics songs developed by the researcher, Accelerated Reader, Rigby Readers, Pair-It Books, Wilson Phonics, Cars and Stars, Words Their Way, THUNKS, Mountain Language, 1989 Harcourt basal readers (HBJ), Dolch sight word lists, 1989 Silver Burdette basal readers, Interactive Achievement, Open Court decodable readers, Reading A-Z, and Flocabulary.

In particular, the Harcourt Houghton Mifflin *Journeys* basal reading program adopted by the school system 3 years ago drew widespread discussion among the participants who agreed that as a whole, the basal series is used as an instructional resource and not as their primary tool for literacy instruction.

Robin explained, "Our foundational program is the *Journeys* basal. We start from there, but obviously have to supplement that quite a bit."

Liza indicated that although she uses *Journeys,* she "picks and chooses" from this series.

Additionally, Isabelle suggested that for second grade the "leveled readers are very beneficial to use in small groups." Emma indicated that the teachers in her grade level use the *Journeys* leveled readers for Accelerated Reader.

Faith also mentioned that she and her colleagues "use our county's literacy program, our basal series, as a supplement only." She continued, "The series does have good pieces in it, but we just use those pieces to supplement Mrs. King's reading program."

Nora and Jill mentioned *Journeys* as a literacy resource; however, Katie noted that she does use the *Journeys* basal series "for their weekly story and their skills."

In the area of strategy instruction, the majority of the teachers indicated that they provide daily reading instruction in small group and one-on-one settings. Reading groups are fluid or flexible according to some, therefore, students can receive the appropriate level of tiered instruction in language arts blocks that range from 70 to 120 minutes per day.

Denise remarked that at her school, "We are definitely all using small-group strategies and one-on-one as often as possible."

Faith explained that the researcher's small-group reading routine has been a successful tool in her classroom and commented about the literacy experiences of her own children, stating:

> My youngest experienced her reading program at its most enriched. His reading success is dramatically different from the other two. Even my husband has noticed the differences and said, 'Whatever she is doing… it works! He reads much better than the other two did at the same age.'

Nora also commented on the systematic daily routine, stating, "The program has proven very effective for teachers and more importantly for students. Children have demonstrated enormous progress with their reading skills." Likewise, Anna and Emma suggested that they continue to use many aspects of the program as part of their literacy instructional block.

Interview Question 3

Which of these programs, resources, or strategies do you perceive as contributing to reading achievement? How, or in what ways?

Throughout the interview process of this study, teachers, reading specialists, and

administrators shared their perceptions regarding the numerous programs, resources, and

strategies perceived as contributing to literacy achievement. Common themes emerged that

underscored a balanced approach to literacy instruction to include phonics, vocabulary,

comprehension, fluency, and writing instruction successfully being employed across various

classrooms and grade levels. In concert with the integration of these literacy strategies and

components, educators emphasized volume reading as essential to reading development.

Vocabulary development also emerged as a critical component in enhancing comprehension.

> Reflecting on her school as a building-level administrator, Melissa remarked:

> The most effective practice that we have is providing the foundation of phonics
> instruction that allows us to independently place books in the hands of students as early
> as preschool. This allows them to put their phonics rules into practice, improve in
> fluency, and begin placing meaning into text. The leveled books and reading programs
> also encourage volume amounts of reading, which allows them to increase their level of
> reading quickly.

> She went on to explain that her school had successfully implemented "a school-wide

comprehension skill every month in which key words and phrases are highlighted each morning

on the Morning News Show, and application questions are posed to all students in pre-K through

fifth grade."

> In her role as an administrator, Nora stated:

> We use a reading program that Mrs. King has developed and implemented. She began
> developing the program when she was a classroom teacher. Mrs. King tweaked the
> program as a classroom teacher and has continued to perfect the program in her role as a
> building-level administrator. The program has proven very effective for teachers and
> more importantly students. Children have demonstrated enormous progress with their
> reading skills.

> Similarly, Beth continued the discussion by commenting:

> Definitely since I've begun using Mrs. Kings reading program—it's amazing! They learn
> in spite of me. Every year I've become a better facilitator of the program. I just use the
> eight steps. The program, of course in kindergarten, starts off being a little bit smaller. I

use the word lists--words in isolation, the vocabulary component, and then it's putting those pieces back into reading. So for me, her reading program is the backbone.

Beth further shared, "I definitely say that my children from my homeroom are stronger readers, because I'm using Mrs. King's reading program. They are stronger readers because they have the rigorous paced reading program."

Faith added, "I think the program that Mrs. King has in place and brought back to [our school] 3 years ago is a major contributor to our reading successes." She continued by saying, "Mrs. King's program really feeds the natural tendency for the brain to develop and learn new things, then we push them to learn even more."

Hannah shared her thoughts as well, stating:

In the few years that we have used Ms. King's deliberate phonics instruction program, that has contributed probably the greatest to our reading achievement. As a new teacher I assumed that students would just learn what they need to with enough materials and opportunities. But since I've been doing purposeful skills instruction integrating all these literacy aspects into everything through flexible reading groups, I feel like that has increased our reading achievement across the board.

Anna also believes in a strong phonics base, stating, "I think our phonics instruction is very good. We work on high frequency words, and specific phonics rules for each story. We use phonics songs to help students learn the different phonics rules." Anna further shared her beliefs regarding vocabulary: "Our high frequency words, popcorn words, are also introduced using phonics rules and songs created by Mrs. King."

As a third-grade teacher, Jill also noted the importance of phonics instruction as part of the literacy instructional plan:

I think they are all very important and work together to help students be successful as a reader. All of these programs are reliant on having a strong phonics foundation. The students must be able to automatically decode the words and read the text fluently so they can focus their attention on gaining meaning.

One building-level administrator expressed that although she believes in "all of these programs, resources, and strategies, not one in particular contributes to the reading achievement of all of our students." She went on to say that volume reading plays a significant role in literacy achievement, and that the Accelerated Reader program gives teachers a way to track their students' progress.

Patty offered her thoughts regarding the topic stating that Accelerated Reader (AR) is beneficial to the students she serves as a reading specialist "because it encourages the kids to become interested in reading. The AR program gives them a picture of where they are and how they're doing." Regarding strategies, Patty explained:

> My strategies vary. I use many different strategies, but one that I'm especially stressing now involves vocabulary. I'm finding that my students have a very weak vocabulary, and building that vocabulary definitely improves reading, of course. The reader sounds out, chunks the word, or says blank and goes on to the end of the sentence, and if that doesn't work for them they get help.

As a reading specialist, Quinn expressed her belief that all of the programs, resources, and strategies contribute in various ways; however, it depends upon the needs of the child. She noted:

> So many children that really, really struggle to read need all of those—all of their senses going into this reading process because of things like their phonological memory, their long-term memory does not work in the same way that other children that read easily work, and they have to be taught differently. As far as teaching them phonological awareness, it is pretty easy, using the Wilson Program—a lot of repetition…But, we also have to develop knowledge…I use A to Z reading books which I think are fabulous. They are very rich in language…They are very strong in nonfiction text features so I use that a lot. But now, this year, because of my principal, I use the program that she used when she taught reading, and I think it's really good because it's so leveled, and I think it's good for fluency.

Robin also discussed her beliefs as a reading specialist regarding phonics as essential to a balanced program. She stated:

I think for our school and our students, one of our most effective approaches is using and teaching phonics and word study very heavily in the lower grades—getting those kids where they are reading automatically. So, I put a lot of credence in the Wilson which is the systematic approach for phonics and word study.

In addition, Robin offered her perspective on writing, saying:

I also think that the writing element, it's not a resource per se, but I think the writing element can't be discounted. We do a lot of writing in first and second grade and I think it shows up as they get into higher grades—what they know about language and how it fits together.

Liza offered a differing opinion saying that as a third-year teacher she continues to rely on *Journeys.* She noted:

For my regular instruction I use *Journeys* but I typically just use the stories and comprehension resources from it. *Journeys* has a lot of good resources that has contributed to reading achievement. I would say Interactive Achievement has been pretty effective, especially with the technology, but I mainly use *Journeys*, and then utilize Interactive Achievement to apply the skill taught from *Journeys* to see if they are getting the comprehension skills.

Similarly, Jill mentioned *Journeys,* Cars and Stars, and Interactive Achievement as resources she believes are beneficial, adding:

The *Journeys* material presents a variety of text and helps to introduce each reading comprehension strategy one at a time. Then, Cars and Stars really goes in depth, taking those specific areas of comprehension and reinforcing how to use those strategies when reading and when testing….Finally, students are assessed to determine areas of mastery and concepts needing re-teaching using Interactive Achievement testing and released SOL tests.

In addition to the strategies, resources, and programs discussed, Denise commented: "I failed to mention our Reading Recovery program which is essential especially for those students who are in the lower tier, struggling. They get that one-on-one time with our Reading Recovery teachers, so that is essential for us."

Interview Questions 4

Are there programs, resources, or strategies in your district, school, or grade level that you

perceive as not contributing to reading achievement? Which ones and why?

Leading the discussion on resources, strategies, and programs that are perceived as not

contributing to reading achievement, Olivia stated:

> The basal series, *Journeys*, does not move at a satisfactory pace. Our school uses the
> basal series as more of a supplement, rather than a program. If we followed this series
> with fidelity, we would not be achieving as well. Our students would not be making the
> gains in reading as they are now.

> Similarly, Melissa noted:

> My personal feeling is that if you use any basal series like *Journeys*, for instance, from
> beginning to end, it does not contribute to reading success simply because it does not
> provide enough differentiation to effectively balance each of the necessary components
> of literacy instruction. It should be used as one of many resources.

> Anna added, "I think that our current reading series [*Journeys*] doesn't take our students

to the level of expectation we have for them."

Beth, who teachers kindergarten, further stated, "If I taught strictly by the basal my kids

would never be where they are…That basal series [*Journeys*] would have never gotten two-thirds

of my classroom past a second-grade reading level, using that alone."

Gerry also expressed an opinion regarding the current basal, stating, "*Journeys* skills are

not necessarily organized in the best manner, and not necessarily ordered in instructional order,

so I do what I can."

However, Hannah believes that all of the resources contribute in some manner. She stated,

"Really all the programs that we have are useful to some degree….I think all the different pieces

that we have contribute something to our balanced literacy."

Expressing her viewpoint, Quinn stated:

Worksheets and workbooks do not contribute at all. I think it's detrimental. I think it's terrible. I think it's awful, especially a struggling reader, at a desk, by that child's self to work on a worksheet filled with 90% of words that child can't read, and fuss at them when they can't do it. And, it's not their fault that they can't do it. I think that's terrible. I think that's detrimental. I think it breaks their spirit. I think they stop trying.

Interview Question 5

How do you approach the literacy learning of your struggling readers?

Elementary educators discussed meeting the needs of their struggling readers. The most frequently discussed topics were:

1. Balanced literacy instruction that included the five components of reading

2. Explicit, systematic phonics-based instruction

3. Explicit comprehension instruction and vocabulary development

4. Volume reading

5. Small-group and one-on-one instruction

According to Melissa, preassessment is the first step in identifying the needs of struggling readers. She stated:

We obviously start with preassessment to determine the specific reading level of the student, as well as the specific weaknesses in decoding, vocabulary, or comprehension. From there we design a reading program that addresses those needs on an appropriate level. We conduct formative assessments regularly in order to gather data to continually drive our instruction. Of course, we have to know what target areas are of greatest need, or otherwise we're shooting in the dark and our efforts become ineffective. I think it's important that we keep great records of student data for our struggling readers to track their progress continuously.

Hannah also provided her thoughts on preassessment as an essential first step in targeting each student's area of weakness. She stated:

I think it's very important to assess exactly where they're at and keep them in that zone of what they need, scaffolding, and to not continually frustrate students. A teacher needs to have an understanding of a child's background knowledge and also build their confidence working one-on-one or small group as much as possible throughout the day.

Faith, a first grade teacher, suggested that repetition is key for struggling readers, stating, "Exposure, exposure, exposure then repeat! Every child who ever learned to read has learned this way." She further remarked that she and her first grade colleagues use "every available resource and teacher to reach our striving readers. Volume learning produces the greatest success available to the student."

Quinn also believes repetition is critical for struggling readers. She explained:

> Repetition is the key to learning. My band director always said that, and I didn't really realize that until I taught these children. I get them a lot of times in kindergarten. Follow them through fifth grade. I know that some of the skills that they don't have in second grade that some children get before they even come to school or master in kindergarten will take them until fifth grade sometimes to master. But I stick with it and they have to stick with it. That's just the key to it—is never giving up with them. They will get it in their own time. They just have to be taught. It has to be taught in their kind of way. It has to be taught in a different kind of way than our usual way.

Beth added to the discussion by communicating her determination to teach all children to read fluently and well before they leave her classroom. She stated, "…It's just that daily consistency, that relentlessness, that, I will teach you how to read." She continued by discussing the importance of repetition for struggling readers, as well as the importance of incorporating a variety of genres, stating, "My struggling readers do two rereads and a new read every day. The leveled readers I use are fiction and nonfiction books. I believe it is important to give the students this exposure."

Carla discussed the need for more time and one-on-one for struggling readers with daily writing as a necessary component. She commented:

> Those students [struggling readers] you have to spend a little more one-on-one time with. I like to give them different books, and that way I can spend my time with those students a little bit longer on solo things…I like to have them write with me. Just whatever we need to practice to get that reading level higher.

Denise emphasized the need for one-on-one and phonics instruction for meeting the needs of her struggling readers, saying, "I definitely work with them individually. "I pull in our phonics strategies that we're using somehow in different ways to try to keep it interesting for them…We do small groups daily, and as much individualized time as possible with those students is key."

Emma also added to the subject of individualized instruction: "We have a really good program in first grade, or I feel like we do, where we divide our students into homogeneous groups to teach reading…They get very individualized instruction exactly on their level."

Further emphasizing the need for small group and one-on-one instruction, Isabelle shared her thoughts:

> My struggling readers do participate in whole group instruction, but I also make sure they read leveled readers with me. The [small] reading groups permit students to progress without frustration. They also feel less intimidated to discuss and answer questions than in the whole group setting. They do more rereading than the other groups to promote fluency and vocabulary development. They also have more exposure to sight words and vocabulary instruction.

Second-grade teacher, Gerry, shared a new small-group inclusion method:

> With our struggling readers, we're trying a new program this year…We have a resource assistant who is in for 30 minutes. She pulls two students, then the resource teacher takes those students…The reading specialist has four kids at the table at the back of the room. The resource teacher has two kids at the table. I've got seven students scattered around me in a horseshoe and I can get to every one of them.

Although Olivia acknowledged the critical elements of small-group and one-on-one instruction, she mentioned "…Reading Specialist, Kindergarten Intervention teacher, Reading Recovery teacher, and tutors," as additional supports for struggling readers. She further noted that her school uses volunteers to read with students who do not receive support at home.

As a third-grade teacher, Katie takes a different approach by identifying her struggling students based upon weekly spelling and word count. She explained: "I take the bottom five, based on their word count, each week, and I work with them daily. I listen to them read, and that

80

is the same five that I have in small groups that we do our writing together. So, we are looking

at mechanics and their spelling."

Adding to the discussion regarding one on one, Jill noted, "I think struggling readers a lot

of times need one on one. You need to take that child and read with them…and really hone in on

what it is that's causing them to struggle."

Liza also offered her viewpoint in connection with third-grade struggling readers,

commenting about the importance of small groups, vocabulary, and a lot of visuals. She

explained:

> Mainly I have the small group, and I use visuals with my struggling readers, mainly for vocabulary. Vocabulary, I think is the most important thing with the struggling readers because they just do not have a broad vocabulary. I use a picture so the children can associate a visual with a particular word. The Flocabulary I think is really good because anything to music, anything that's going to catch their attention I try to use. I do that with all of my students, but I think it's most important with my struggling readers—the visuals and the small groups.

In her position as a reading specialist, Robin further discussed the importance of

vocabulary development, stating:

> We do a lot of assessment at the beginning of the year…We try to find out exactly where they are, and try to take them where they need to be, is the basic philosophy…AR and RAZ are good just because they hit them at their level, and vocabulary is an area where we're seeing struggling readers struggle with. It's not that they don't know what a synonym is or an antonym, but they just have such limited background and vocabulary knowledge that it's hard for them to apply what they know because they don't have the expansive vocabulary that they need to have, so, one of the things I try to do in my position is work on building that vocabulary by comparing and contrasting and kind of flooding them with as many words as I can.

Interview Question 6

Do you have students with disabilities in your classroom? How do you approach their literacy

learning?

The discussion encompassing students with disabilities began with comments from

reading specialists Quinn, Robin, and Patty. Offering her viewpoint on the importance of

individualized instruction, Quinn stated:

> I do have students with lots of learning disabilities. I have students with low IQs. I have
> students with specific learning disabilities. I have students that just have trouble with
> decoding and encoding, but their IQs are probably at the top. Again, it is an
> individualized thing. When the child is really and truly a really struggling learner, for
> whatever reason, I often pull them for one-on-one or one-to-two with students that have
> that same kind of difficulty in learning to read, and I just set a program right for them.
> Whatever they particularly need—just for them.

Robin added her thoughts by stressing the importance of providing individualized literacy

instruction to students with disabilities. She stated:

> I do have some students with disabilities, and I work real closely with our resource
> teachers. Some of them are students who have accommodations for a read-a-loud but we
> still try. We don't just give up on their reading learning. We try to hit them really hard
> with Wilson, word study, and also with some fluency to try to build that no matter where
> they are. Of course, when we approach their literacy learning, a lot of it is hearing the
> words being read aloud and trying to process that. But I think our school tries to really
> take the approach that even though those students have a disability it doesn't mean they
> can never learn to read. It means it's just going to be slower going and that they can have
> some sort of success.

Extending the discussion, Patty remarked:

> Many of my students have learning disabilities. For example, they skip words and have
> difficulty tracking. I become aware of how they can learn and design what they can do. I
> use a more visual approach, even drawing pictures if the strategy applies to the approach.
> I work closer with things like having them read to me and picturing in their minds things
> happening as they read. These students need a different approach as they struggle to
> learn to read.

In connection with students with disabilities, Jill offered her perspective as a third-grade

classroom teacher by explaining that additional support and communication with the special

education teacher is key to meeting the needs of these students. She stated:

> I have found that students with disabilities often need additional support, not just from
> the resource teachers but also from myself on a daily basis. I think also having good
> relationships and conversations with the resource teachers who are working with them

frequently, so that we are reinforcing the same strategies and working on the same skills, is vital to helping students with disabilities. It's very important to me that the resource teacher is working with them on what they are struggling with in my classroom. Communication is key.

Kindergarten teacher Anna said she provides extra support for her students with disabilities through volunteers and tutors. She also mentioned the on-line reading program RAZ for those with Internet at home. In addition, she prints books from the Reading A to Z website for students to take home and keep.

Beth expressed that she treats students with disabilities in her classroom the same; however, she provides targeted, intensified intervention in an effort to address their various needs. Like Anna, she uses outside volunteers such as fifth-grade helpers, and ensures that they receive additional support from the resource assistant or tutors.

Also commenting on students with disabilities, Emma discussed the differentiated, individualized instruction she and others provide. She stated:

I do have two [students with disabilities]. One that started first grade with an IEP and another that's just became identified, and like I said, with their reading instruction those are two of the three students that are in that very easy reading group with one teacher and three students… It has to be that basic to get it down on her level."

Also with two students with disabilities in her first-grade classroom, Faith noted, "These students are already above grade level in their literacy testing and are exceeding my expectations. The only problem exhibited by these two students is in relation to writing due to their inability to pronounce the words correctly."

Similarly, Hannah's student is also reading on or above grade level. She explained, "I have one student with an IEP, but ironically he is one of the better readers that I have in my class. His trouble is more with behavior that influences academics." She goes on to comment on

83

another student who struggles in reading, but, "…receives as much individual and small-group

help as possible."

Gerry added to the discussion by stating:

I have two students with disabilities. Typically those kids I only have them for about 15 minutes. They are pulled out into a small group [with the resource teacher] but when I've worked with them, if we're doing something as a group, I just slow the pace and material down a little bit. I slow it down so they can participate and be a part of that group. Everyone else in the group contributes so no one knows the difference. I just slightly alter the pace.

Discussing her views on small-group instruction, Isabelle noted:

I include most students with disabilities in my small groups, and this works well. One student I have this year has a full-time aide. I write down what I want her to accomplish with him each day. When tutors are available, adults or older students, students with disabilities may be assigned to them if their learning problems are more severe than others.

Katie also suggested that students with disabilities, "…do not always struggle

academically, but in other ways." For those who do struggle academically, she surmised that

additional assistance is necessary. She said:

They read with me. I look at their materials completely before it is turned in to make sure everything is done and that it is done accurately. I often pair them up with students just to boost morale if they are struggling and to help them finish their assignments.

Building-level administrators offered their thoughts on students with disabilities relative

to each of their respective schools.

According to Olivia:

Students with disabilities receive small-group and one-on-one instruction in the regular classroom. They also receive specialized instruction from the special education teacher in an inclusion or resource setting. The regular education teacher and the special education teacher collaborate to determine what is or is not working for individual students. They brainstorm in order to come up with strategies to increase the literacy learning of students with disabilities.

Melissa extended the discussion by adding:

84

We do have special education students in our school. We have tried specifically to target their instruction in the inclusion setting through the expertise of the regular education teacher and the special education teacher. There are also instructional times in the resource setting for those students who work best one-on-one or in a small group. Their instruction is modified and differentiated by both teachers, but held to high expectations for success based on their potential.

Nora also shared that students with disabilities in her school receive numerous specialized services. She stated:

We do have students with disabilities in all of our classrooms, and they are supported by an array of instructors: core classroom teachers, reading specialists, special education teachers, instructional assistants and tutors. Our special education model is a mixture of mainly inclusion and some pull out. We strive to meet the various needs of our students with disabilities by implementing this model.

Interview Question 7

Do you have economically disadvantaged students in your classroom? How do you approach their literacy learning?

The discussion regarding economically disadvantaged students begins with perspectives from the administrators. Melissa discussed her school's efforts to meet the needs of the economically disadvantaged students: She explained:

For those students, we have tried desperately to immerse every minute of their day in some type of literacy exposure or instruction, whether it's reading to a partner, reading on the computer using RAZ kids, or reading to a tutor. We have started taking our first bus load of students to the computer labs at 7:30am in the morning so they can immediately, upon arrival, take an AR test, read a RAZ story, or read to the bus duty teacher. That takes place until 8:15am. This time often replaces the time lost in reading at home, if literacy is not a priority within the home. We also provide afterschool tutoring opportunities for those students who struggle.

Adding to the discussion, Nora shared that economically disadvantaged students are held to the same high expectations as all other students. She noted:

We do have economically disadvantaged students in all of our classrooms and we approach them just as we would approach a child who is not economically disadvantaged. Those expectations are the same—progress to their fullest potential. We realize that some children, at least a part of our population, once they leave us at 3:00pm they are not

exposed to any literacy or any practice of reading. It is our responsibility when we have them in the school to do everything we can to keep them on or above grade level.

Olivia continued by discussing the opportunities her school provides for economically disadvantaged students who require academic assistance. She commented:

Economically disadvantaged students receive small-group and one-on-one instruction with the classroom teacher and time with the reading specialist, kindergarten intervention teacher, Reading Recovery teacher, tutors, and volunteers, as necessary. The strategies used for struggling readers are really the same that are used for those who are economically disadvantaged.

Reading specialists Robin, Quinn, and Patty discussed how they meet the needs of the economically disadvantaged population in their respective schools. According to Patty, access to materials is a concern. She said, "In knowing that they do not have access to materials like the other students, I spend more time explaining and talking about the content in the book."

Patty went on to express her concern regarding vocabulary, adding, "I use many more visuals with these students. Vocabulary deficiency is also an issue with the disadvantaged students. This area is a focus of great concern in teaching reading."

Expressing her perspective, Quinn discussed her method of language development. She explained:

Most of the students that I work with are economically disadvantaged. That's when I feel like I become their mother…I work with them in the same way that I did with my children when they were growing up. I read to them. I talk about experiences. We get on the computer. We go outside if we need to experience things…I am really developing their prior knowledge—language, language, language. We talk. I tell them words. It's a lot of repetition. It is a lot of the same thing year after year, until they get it…Most of the children I work with I have them overlearn. I over teach.

Robin added her thoughts by talking about the issue of literacy, specifically, vocabulary deficiencies. She explained:

Actually, I think probably just about 100% of mine are economically disadvantaged in my classroom. I don't know that I approach their literacy learning differently other than just to say that I realize that their background knowledge is limited, their vocabulary

knowledge is limited. Probably, reading is not a priority in their home, so you just have to understand that's their background. When they come to school their idea of school is not always what a more economically advantaged child would view school. So, I think you have to tackle those hurdles and realize that whatever learning goes on is going to be within the four walls of the building.

As a classroom teacher, Denise ensures that her students have needed materials: "You just have to make sure that you have resources there at school for them. Sometimes they don't come back if they are sent home, but I send them anyway." She added, "I try to keep in touch with parents as often as possible."

Faith further shared her viewpoint on literacy instruction for all students irrespective of their economic status. She noted:

> Every student that enters a classroom receives the same literacy instruction. We begin with phonics, fluency and comprehension and progress as quickly as the students' skills allow. We as teachers approach each child as homeless and thus try to pour school work and homework into one seven-hour period.

Hannah continued the discussion by underscoring the importance of providing books to students. She commented:

> I must provide them with as many books on their level and interest as I possibly can, and when we do book orders give them the chance to earn books that they may not otherwise be able to purchase. I also think we must make up in school for any missing background knowledge and experiences they may have missed out on. Valuing education or literacy may have not been the culture in their homes and I have to make up for that.

According to Isabelle, "These students often need more one-on-one instruction as time permits. Sometimes this includes homework help. Also, these students generally need more vocabulary development…"

Jill emphasized that students' basic needs must be met before learning can take place. She commented:

> I think first of all you have to make sure their basic needs are met. If the kids are hungry, if they are worried about what's going on at home, if kids don't have the correct clothing and they're cold they're not going to be able to pay attention. They're not going to learn.

As far as specific literacy needs I have found often economically disadvantaged students may not have the strongest parental support at home and, so, sometimes I find I need to provide them extra support in the classroom—help with their homework, and really check in on them and make sure they are understanding the concepts so they don't fall behind.

Katie continued the discussion by addressing parent communication and describing how she addresses literacy for students from economically disadvantaged homes. She stated:

They don't often take home the books that they need because it's really not a priority at home. So, I make sure they have an AR test under their belt every day; that they are progressing along with the other kids in their written expression. And, I just make time…I do feel their parents want them to be successful, and if you can write them encouraging words…But, keeping in contact with them kind of holds the parents responsible, and though they are taxed with the financial end of their existence, they do see that they want better for their child. Often times, they are open for suggestions.

Interview Question 8

Do you have gifted students in your classroom? How do you approach their literacy learning?

As a kindergarten teacher, Carla suggested that gifted students in her classroom reading on a second- and third-grade level participate in the Accelerated Reader program. She said, "I test them early and do STAR literacy testing in September instead of waiting like I do for the other students. I had to go ahead and let them start the AR."

First-grade teacher Faith shared her thoughts, stating, "Mrs. King's reading program is such that each child develops to their own maximum. If that maximum is never reached then the teacher never stops enriching."

Isabelle, a second-grade teacher, also assigns AR and higher-leveled books as part of literacy enrichment. She noted:

We do novel studies with books a year or more above their grade level. Also, I use the advanced leveled readers that come with the reading series for their reading group. In Accelerated Reader, they are reading more advanced books, also. When I assign this group a writing assignment, I expect a better quality and more details.

Jill's first approach is to ensure that the students in her third-grade classroom have mastered the required material before progressing to more challenging content. She explained:

> First, I try to make sure that they are very strong and have completely mastered all the concepts and essential skills that they need to know, not just skip all that and assume they know it. I often find there are gaps and misconceptions in their learning that I need to clarify. Then, I like to challenge my gifted students and push them. In reading, I really focus on asking them the highest level of comprehension questions, work to expand their vocabularies, encourage them to ask questions, and challenge them to read outside their comfort zone.

Melissa and Olivia explained the programs available for gifted students at their schools. According to Melissa, students receive enrichment through book studies, research projects, and they "utilize not only reading but also good habits of research and writing."

Similarly, Olivia says, "Gifted students often read chapter books on their level and report or do projects on what they have read…Teachers often emphasize writing and often work to enhance the writing skills of gifted students."

Interview Question 9

What is your expectation for level of year-end reading achievement for each group: low, average, and high readers?

Expectations for reading progress varied among the participants, with expectations that ranged, on average, from 1 to 2 years of growth during the school year.

Robin explained her viewpoint of setting the bar too low:

> My level of expectation is that they read on grade level by the time I get done with them. Even if they are a year behind, my philosophy is that they need to make up two years growth in one year. That's the expectation. I can't say that's how it always works out but I think that's the goal, otherwise, I think we're just kind of leaving the bar too low for them.

Likewise, Quinn expressed a similar view of not setting limits. She stated:

If that child can go four years, I am going four years. If that child can only do two months, I'm going for two months, but I don't want to limit myself in saying, 'Just this much,' because they almost always make a year's growth or more under the program helping them out, but I want more than that if I can get it.

Patty stated, "The level of achievement of each child I work with depends on the student's ability. I expect at least a year and half growth—for some, I expect higher." According to Melissa, "If they are below grade level it is the expectation that they would make at least two years progress to try and catch them up as quickly as possible."

Olivia explained, "We hope to take each student as far as he or she can go. A year and a half to 2 years of growth for each child, regardless of their level at the beginning of the year is a reasonable goal."

Interview Question 10

Are there additional factors you believe contribute to reading achievement?

Teachers, reading specialists, and administrators shared their beliefs regarding external factors that can potentially inhibit or advance literacy achievement. Faith began the discussion by offering her perspective. She stated:

Family support and interaction contribute greatly to reading success. This support is not dependent on economics. Student motivation to succeed is also a huge contributor. An economically disadvantaged student with the drive to learn can quickly become more successful than their peers with more advantages, family and economics. The final contributor is teacher motivation and involvement. If you do not believe in what and how you are being asked to teach you will not be effective in creating a successful learning environment. Teacher ownership to each student's success is crucial.

Quinn also shared her thoughts on the impact of the teacher. She explained:

Teachers. The teacher's drive. The teacher's personal conviction. Definitely the teacher. Definitely. If the teacher doesn't give up, the child can't give up. You just don't let them. I know that is hard, you know, for a child that's very difficult for them. They are working the hardest they can work, probably, but then they are successful. And, you have to help them feel success. That's so important in a classroom setting.

90

According to Robin quality instruction within the classroom matters; however, strong literacy leadership is also crucial to student success. She remarked:

> I think at the school level that if you have strong leadership within your building, I think that would have to contribute to reading achievement for all your kids. If your leader sees the value of reading, and understands reading, I think that translates to the teachers, and I also think that quality teacher instruction is where it happens in the trenches.

As an administrator Melissa described her philosophy regarding how students can be successful through quality instruction. She stated:

> I feel that the students that we're seeing experiencing extreme reading achievement and growth are the ones in which we have targeted their specific needs phonetically and in comprehension, and have provided every minute of opportunity for them to be reading on their level. Our third through fifth graders are working on exposure to text features and nonfiction informational text. I think that's a huge successful focus now in teaching them to think critically, and in a way, that's going to help them use functional text to improve their ability to read for meaning. Obviously, exposure to all types of text, and a continual focus on building the foundation of learning to read while making the successful shift to reading to learn.

Continuing the discussion, Beth commented, "I do believe that the drive students have will make a difference. Some households do not place importance on reading, so we have to be the encourager and teach the importance of reading.

Anna believes that home support and attendance are important factors, noting, "When students have home support they excel so much quicker. Attendance is also very important. She continued, "Having needed resources at the high levels of expectations and technology in the hands of our students would prove to benefit them as well."

"Additional factors that contribute to reading achievement," said, Olivia, "include exposing students to all different types of genres, having a classroom library filled with leveled books on varying subjects, and reminding students that there are different purposes for reading."

"It takes a whole community," noted Carla. She continued, "If they go home and Mom and Dad say, 'Basketball is more important,' and they don't do homework, I think, that is a shame."

Denise expressed her thoughts regarding outlying factors that can potentially impact reading achievement. She remarked:

> Some children just aren't exposed to literature. They don't get a sense of that at home. Some parents don't read and show that love, so you have to find their interests in that way. I do think that speech and language could be another issue…Phonetics, phonics can be really difficult for them. Attention, sometimes, is really difficult to get students to, you know, focus. Again, if you can get their interests, get what they are interested in.

Hannah continued the discussion by remarking, "I think probably the biggest factor on reading achievement is the culture of the home…If students come from a home environment that does not value reading or education, that's a pretty big obstacle that the teachers have to overcome."

Jill concluded the discussion by expressing her perspective about factors that impact reading achievement. She explained:

> I believe preschool is vital in establishing a strong educational and social foundation. If young children are not around other children to have social experiences, and they're trying to learn that when they come to school, it is going to slow down the learning process. So, I think that it is home environment, it is family priorities and expectations, it's the schools they attend, it's the neighborhood they live in and it's the society and role models that they're exposed to. All these are factors I believe affect reading achievement.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of classroom teachers, reading specialists, and administrators regarding practices and instructional philosophies perceived as contributing to literacy achievement at three elementary schools within the Washington County Virginia Public School System. The study was completed through a process of open-ended interviews with 18 participants comprising 12 classroom teachers, three reading specialists, and three administrators. Participants were given the opportunity to express their views in connection with literacy practices and programming based upon their personal knowledge, philosophies, and experiences. The results from the interviews were categorized and synthesized according to emerging themes, which provided an organization of the responses encompassing five categories. The themes were (a) providing a balanced approach to literacy instruction with an emphasis on systematic phonics acquisition in kindergarten through second grades, and a focus on explicit comprehension instruction beginning in third grade, (b) development of academic vocabulary to increase background knowledge and comprehension, (c) targeted instruction and intervention in small-group and one-on-one settings, (d) use of supplemental literacy and assessment resources, (e) and frequent opportunities for independent reading practice.

The findings from this study provided an overview and greater understanding of the similarities and differences encompassing the perspectives among the participants. Practitioners may find the information within this study useful when implementing instructional practices,

resources, or programs that contribute to the literacy achievement of all students irrespective of socioeconomic background or ability.

Discussion

The findings from Chapter 4 provided insight into educators' perceptions relative to the topic of literacy. My study focused on one overarching research question: What are the perceptions of kindergarten through third-grade teachers, reading specialists, and administrators about practices that contribute to literacy achievement? The following subquestions were also addressed based upon the data collected from Chapter 4:

3. What programs and resources do elementary educators perceive as contributing to literacy achievement?

4. What instructional strategies do elementary educators perceive as contributing to literacy achievement?

Research Question 1

What programs and resources do elementary educators perceive as contributing to literacy achievement?

Numerous programs and resources were consistently discussed as being part of literacy instruction among teachers, administrators, and reading specialists at each of the three schools; however, phonics-based instruction and phonics materials were referenced repeatedly. In her discussion regarding programs and resources, a third-grade teacher noted:

> I think they are all very important and work together to help students be successful as a reader. All of these programs are reliant on having a strong phonics foundation. The students must be able to automatically decode the words and read the text fluently so they can focus their attention on gaining meaning.

Among the resources referenced as being perceived as contributing to reading achievement are, in no particular order, the following:

1. Accelerated Reader

2. Wilson Phonics

3. Rigby Leveled Readers

4. Cars and Stars

5. THUNKS

6. Words Their Way

7. Reading A-Z

8. Open Court decodable readers

9. RAZ Kids

10. K-2 Reading Routine (Developed by the researcher)

11. Mountain Language

12. Dolch

13. Flocabulary

14. *Journeys* leveled readers

15. Interactive Achievement

Of particular interest, the Harcourt Houghton Mifflin *Journeys* basal program recently adopted by the Washington County Public School Division drew widespread discussion among the participants who expressed that although they found some useful instructional features within the basal, they did not find the basal series to be a comprehensive reading program. Kindergarten through second-grade teachers and reading specialists also agreed that certain features of the series were useful as a supplemental instructional resource but not adequate as a

core literacy program. One reading specialist indicated that although *Journeys* is the adopted county-wide reading program, teachers find it necessary to "supplement that quite a bit."

Another participant suggested that the "basal series, or any basal series, from beginning to end, it does not contribute to reading success simply because it does not provide enough differentiation to effectively balance each of the necessary components of literacy instruction."

Third-grade teachers, however, suggested that they did incorporate the *Journeys* program as part of their core instruction, specifically, the comprehension elements. Allington (2006) suggested that the issue with commercial literacy programs is that the lessons tend to be filled with too many activities and not enough actual reading. He further argued that "no basal reading series contains enough reading material to develop high levels of reading proficiency in children" (p.49).

This idea corresponds with participants' perceptions that volume reading is essential to increasing reading achievement. Although not considered a core program, Accelerated Reader was frequently mentioned as a resource used within each school to increase volume reading.

Research Question 2

1. What strategies or practices do elementary educators perceive as contributing to the literacy achievement?

In the area of instructional strategies and other practices perceived as contributing to literacy achievement, the following emerged as a result of the interview data:

1. Balanced literacy instruction

2. Explicit, systematic, phonics-based instruction

3. Explicit comprehension instruction

4. Vocabulary development

5. Volume reading

6. Small-group instruction

7. Targeted one-on-one instruction

Participants stressed the importance of a balanced approach to literacy instruction; however, emphasis was placed on systematic phonics instruction for increasing reading achievement in kindergarten through second, with a focus on comprehension beginning in third grade.

Further discussed, the phonics-based reading routine developed by the researcher was also noted as contributing to literacy achievement for the students in their specific classrooms. One participant remarked that her students were "stronger readers because I'm using Mrs. King's reading program."

Another participant suggested that the program "is a major contributor to our reading success."

Yet another noted that the program "has contributed probably the greatest to our reading achievement."

In addition to the emerging theme of the role of phonics instruction as an essential literacy component, participants discussed vocabulary development as essential to building background knowledge and improving comprehension, in conjunction with volume reading across various genres to increase reading achievement. According to Stanovich (2000),

> If the development of vocabulary knowledge substantially facilitates comprehension, and if reading itself is a major mechanism leading to vocabulary growth—which in turn will enable more efficient reading—then we truly have a reciprocal relationship that should continue to drive further growth in reading through a person's development…The very children who are reading well and who have good vocabularies will read more, learn more word meanings, and hence read even better. Children with inadequate vocabularies—who read slowly and without enjoyment—read less, and a result have

development of vocabulary knowledge, which inhibits further growth in vocabulary development. (p. 184)

In connection with phonics, comprehension, vocabulary development, and volume reading, participants discussed targeted small-group and one-on-one instruction to address specific weaknesses as identified by assessment data for struggling readers, students with disabilities and students identified as economically disadvantaged. Participants indicated that that they maintain the highest expectations for all students despite ability or economic status. However, participants acknowledged that students with disabilities who struggle with reading typically require additional instructional time and repetition of skills in a small-group or individualized setting. In addition, teachers, administrators, and reading specialists recognized that parental support, attendance, homework, and other social and emotional issues can impact literacy learning. One participant commented that students' basic needs must first be met in order for learning to occur. She further indicated that working to ensure student success through extra instructional support and homework assistance is essential to student success.

<u>Recommendations for Practice</u>

The findings of this study regarding perceptions of practices that contribute to literacy achievement have resulted in the following recommendations:

1. The provision of balanced literacy instruction in kindergarten through third grade

2. An emphasis on phonics skills in kindergarten through second grade, and an emphasis on comprehension skills beginning in third grade

3. Frequent and consistent guided and independent reading time within the classroom setting

4. An increased emphasis on vocabulary development

5. The provision of targeted small-group and one-on-one instruction

6. The use of supplemental literacy and assessment resources

Conclusion

Chapter 5 provided a discussion and analysis of the findings associated with educators' perceptions of practices that contribute to literacy achievement in the Washington County Virginia Public School System. Various perspectives emerged throughout the investigation; however, it is interesting to note that the perceptions among kindergarten through third-grade teachers, reading specialists, and building-level administrators were parallel. Also noteworthy was that educators in this study suggested that successful literacy programming includes specific key programs and resources. Additionally, strategy instruction perceived as essential to increasing literacy achievement, particularly in struggling readers, included small-group and one-on-one targeted instruction; however, some educators stressed the need to preassess in order to deliver optimal individualized instruction. Finally, educators indicated that they held high expectations for all students, regardless of ability or socioeconomic status.

Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of this study was to investigate and examine the perceptions of elementary classroom teachers, reading specialists, and administrators regarding practices that contribute to literacy achievement at three schools in one school division. Further studies in connection with specific evidenced-based literacy practices would add to the body of research.

Recommendations for further research include:

1. An investigation of the level of knowledge of first-year teachers in the area of evidence-based reading instruction might assist colleges in strengthening their education preparation programs for aspiring teachers.

2. A mixed-method study investigating the correlation between educator perceptions of successful literacy instruction and literacy achievement results might provide a deeper understanding of practices and programs that increase reading achievement.

3. A study regarding the perceptions of educators about practices that contribute to math achievement might provide an understanding of the successful resources, programs, and strategies.

4. A study about intensive, systematic small-group reading instruction might assist K-2 teachers in delivering reading instruction that increases the achievement of all students, thus, further closing the achievement gap.

Additional recommendations for further research include the following practices:

1. Daily guided and independent writing opportunities

2. Frequent access to leveled books across all genres with increased exposure to nonfiction and informational text

3. Increased emphasis on content-specific vocabulary instruction

4. Increased emphasis on explicit comprehension instruction beginning in preschool

<u>Summary</u>

The findings from this study provided an outline of the participants' perceptions about practices that contribute to literacy achievement in grades kindergarten through third. In

summation, the participants' perceptions included a balanced approach to literacy instruction with an emphasis on the following: phonics acquisition in kindergarten through second grade; a focus on explicit comprehension instruction beginning in third grade; development of vocabulary to increase background knowledge and comprehension; frequent opportunities for independent reading practice; targeted instruction and intervention in small-group and one-on-on settings; and the use of specific supplemental literacy and assessment resources. In general, participants suggested that most basal series were not comprehensive literacy programs and therefore recommended incorporating supplemental resources.

REFERENCES

Adams, M. (1990). *Beginning to read: Thinking and learning about print*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Allington, R. L. (2006). *What really matters for struggling readers: Designing research-based programs* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.

Allington, R. L. (2012). *What really matters for struggling readers: designing research-based programs* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.

Allor, J., Mathes, P., Roberts, J., Cheatham, J., & Otaiba, S. (2014). Is scientifically based reading instruction effective for students with below-average IQs?. *Exceptional Children*, *80*(3), 287-306. doi:10.1177/0014402914522208

Anderson, R., Hiebert, E. H., Scott, J.A., & Wilkinson, I.A.G. (1985). *Becoming a nation of readers: The report of the Commission on Reading*. Washington, DC: National Academy of Education.

Armbruster, B. B., Lehr, F., Osborn, J., & Adler, C. R. (2001). *Put reading first: The research building blocks for teaching children to read (Kindergarten through grade 3)*. National Institute for Literacy, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. Darby, PA: Diane.

Ashby, C., Burns, J., & Royle, J. (2014). All kids can be readers: The marriage of reading first and inclusive education. *Theory into Practice*, *53*(2), 98-105. doi: 10.1080/00405841.2014.885809

Barber, M., & Mourshed M. (2007). *How the world's best-performing school systems come out on top.* London: McKinsey& Company. Retrieved October 12, 2014, from: http://mckinseyonsociety.com/downloads/reports/Education/Worlds_School_Systems_Final.pdf

Barry, A. (2008). Reading the past: Historical antecedents to contemporary reading methods and materials. *Reading Horizons*, *49*(1), 4. Retrieved November 2, 2014, from: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1044&context=reading_horizons

Bear, D., Invernizzi, M., Templeton, S., & Johnston, F. (2012). *Word study for phonics, vocabulary, and spelling instruction* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon.

Bear, D. R., Negrete, S., & Cathey, S. (2012). Developmental literacy instruction with struggling readers across three stages. *New England Reading Association Journal, 48*(1), 1-9,112,114. Retrieved November 8, 2014

from: https://login.ezproxy.etsu.edu:3443/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1114879271?accountid=10771

Beck, I., McKeown, M., & Kucan, L. (2002*). Bringing words to life: Robust vocabulary instruction*. New York, NY: Guilford.

Beers, G. K. (2003). *When kids can't read, what teachers can do: A guide for teachers, 6-12*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Bembry, K.L., Jordan, H.R., Gomez, E, Anderson, M.C., & Mendro, R.L. (1998). *Policy implications of long-term teacher effects on student achievement.* Paper presented at the 1998 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA. Retrieved November 23, 2014, from: http://www.dallasisd.org/cms/lib/TX01001475/Centricity/Shared/evalacct/research/articles/Bembry-Policy-Implications-of-Long-Term-Teacher-Effects-on-Student-Achievement-1998.pdf

Blackowicz, C. L.Z., & Fisher, P.J., Best practices in vocabulary instruction revised. *In*: Morrow, L.M., & Gambrell, L.B (2011). *Best practices in literacy instruction.* New York, NY: Guilford Press. pp. 224-249.

Blackwell-Bullock, R., Invernizzi, M., Drake, E. A., & Howell, J. L. (2009). Concept of word in text: An integral literacy skill. *Reading In Virginia, 31,* 30-35.

Bond, G. L., & Dykstra, R. (1997). The cooperative research program in first-grade reading instruction. *Reading Research Quarterly, 32*(4), 348. Retrieved November 1, 2014, from: https://login.ezproxy.etsu.edu:3443/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/212128580?accountid=10771

Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). Retrieved January 5, 2015, from: http://www.nationalcenter.org/brown.html

Carroll, J., & Chall, J.S. (1975). *Toward a literate society: The report of the Committee on Reading of the National Academy of Education with a series of papers commissioned by the committee*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Carter, C. J. (1997). Why reciprocal teaching? *Educational Leadership, 54*(6), 64-68. Retrieved January 2, 2015, from: https://login.ezproxy.etsu.edu:3443/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/224854630?accountid=10771

Chall, J.S. (1983*). Learning to read: The great debate*. New York, NY: McGraw Hill.

Chenoweth, K. (2009). *It's being done: Academic success in unexpected schools*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press.

Clark, K. F., & Graves, M. F. (2005). Scaffolding students' comprehension of text. *The Reading Teacher, 58*(6), 570-580. Retrieved November 29, 2014, from: https://login.ezproxy.etsu.edu:3443/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/203280856?accountid=10771

Clay, M.M. (1991). *Becoming literate: The construction of inner control.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Cooper, J. D., & Kiger, N. D. (2003). *Instructor's resource manual and assessment guide [to] literacy: Helping children construct meaning* (*5th ed).* Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Cooper, J.D., Kiger, N.D., Robinson, M.D., & Slansky, J.A. (2012*). Literacy: Helping children construct meaning (8th ed).* Stamford, CT: Cengage Learning.

Creswell, J.W. (2008). *Research Design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods and approaches* (3rd ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, Inc.

Cunningham, P. M. (2009). *What really matters in vocabulary: Research-based practices across the curriculum.* Boston, MA: Pearson.

Dalton, B. (2014). E-text and e-books are changing the literacy landscape. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *96*(3), 38-43.

Darling-Hammond, L. (1996). What matters most: A competent teacher for every child. *Phi Delta Kappan, 78*(3), 193-200. Retrieved October 12, 2014, from: https://login.ezproxy.etsu.edu:3443/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/218472535?accountid=10771

Dolch, E.W. (1936). A basic sight vocabulary. *Elementary School Journal, 36,* 456-460.

Ferrandino, V. L., & Tirozzi, G. (2004, May 5). Wanted: A comprehensive literacy agenda preK–12. [Adventorial] *Education Week, 23*(24), 29. Retrieved February 22, 2015, from: http://www.nassp.org/Portals/0/Content/46537.pdf

Flesch, R. (1955). *Why Johnny can't read: And what you can do about it*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

Gambrell, L.B., Malloy, J.A., & Mazzoni, S.A. Evidenced-based best practices in comprehensive literacy instruction. *In*: Morrow, L.M., & Gambrell, L.B (2011). *Best practices in literacy instruction.* New York, NY: Guilford Press. pp 11-36.

Goodman, K. S., & Goodman, Y. M. (1979). Learning to read is natural. In L. B. Resnick & P. A. Weaver (Eds.), *Theory and practice of early reading, Vol. 1* (pp. 137-154). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Harvey, S., & Goudvis, A. (2013). Comprehension at the core. *Reading Teacher*, *66*(6), 432-439. doi:10.1002/TRTR.1145

Hattie, J. (2003). *Teachers make a difference: What is the research evidence?* Retrieved January 2, 2015, from University of Auckland, Australian Council for Educational Research website: http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/limestonecoast/files/pages/new%20page/plc/teachers_make_a_difference.pdf

International Reading Association. (1998). *Using multiple methods of beginning reading instruction: A position statement of the international reading association* [Brochure]. Newark, DE Author. Retrieved, June 18, 2014 from: www.reading.org

International Reading Association. (2002). *What is evidence-based reading instruction: A position statement of the International Reading Association.* Newark, DE: Author. Retrieved June 18, 2914 from: www.reading.org

Irwin, J. (2007). *Teaching reading comprehension processes* (3rd ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Allyn and Bacon.

Jensen, E. (2009). *Teaching with poverty in mind what being poor does to kids' brains and what schools can do about it.* Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Johnson, P., & Keier, K. (2010). *Catching readers before they fall: Supporting readers who struggle, K-4.* Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Juel, C. (1988). Learning to read and write: A longitudinal study of 54 children from first through fourth grades. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *80*(4), 437-447. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.80.4.437

Kamil, M. L., Borman, G. D., Dole, J., Kral, C. C., Salinger, T., & Torgesen, J. (2008). *Improving adolescent literacy: Effective classroom and intervention practices: A practice guide.* Retrieved September 5, 2014, from National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education website: http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc.

Kim, J. S. (2008). Research and the reading wars. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *89*(5), 372-375. Retrieved May 3, 2014, from http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/ktoc.htm

Kuhn, M. R., & Rasinski, T. R. Best practices in fluency instruction. *In*: Morrow, L.M., & Gambrell, L.B (2011). *Best practices in literacy instruction.* New York, NY: Guilford Press. pp. 276-294.

Labbo, L. D., & Teale, W. H. An emergent-literacy perspective on reading instruction in kindergarten. *In: Instructional models in reading*. Stahl, Steven A. (Ed); Hayes, David A. (Ed); Hillsdale, NJ, England: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc. pp. 249-281.

Martin, B., & Carle, E. (1996). *Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?* New York: Henry Holt.

Marzano, R. J. (2004). *Building background knowledge for academic achievement research on what works in schools*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Marzano, R., Pickering, D., & Pollock, J. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement*. Alexandria, Va.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Marzano, R.J, & Toth, M.D. (2014). *Teaching for rigor: A call for a critical instructional shift*. Retrieved November 29, 2014, from Marzano Center, Learning Sciences International website: http://www.marzanocenter.com/files/Teaching-for-Rigor-20140318.pdf

Mathes, P. G., Denton, C. A., Fletcher, J. M., Anthony, J. L., Francis, D. J., & Schatschneider, C. (2005). The effects of theoretically different instruction and student characteristics on the skills of struggling readers. *Reading Research Quarterly, 40*(2), 148-163,165-182. Retrieved November 18, 2014, from: https://login.ezproxy.etsu.edu:3443/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/212137379?accountid=10771

Mavrogenes, N. A. (1985). William Scott Gray: Leader of teachers and shapers of American reading (Doctoral dissertation). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (AAT 303453930).

McGee, L.M., & Morrow, L. M. (2005). *Teaching literacy in kindergarten.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

McKenna, M. C. (2014). Literacy instruction in the brave new world of technology. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *96*(3), 8-13.

McLaughlin, M. (2012). Reading comprehension: What every teacher needs to know. *Reading Teacher*, *65*(7), 432-440. doi:10.1002/TRTR.01064

McMillan, J., & Schumacher, S. (2010). *Research in education: Evidence-based inquiry* (7th ed.). Boston: Pearson Education.

Morrow, L.M., & Gambrell, L.B. (2011). *Best practices in literacy instruction.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Morrow, L.M., Tracey, D.H., & Del Nero, J.R. Best practices in early literacy: Preschool, kindergarten, and first grade. *In*: Morrow, L.M., & Gambrell, L.B (2011). *Best practices in literacy instruction.* New York, NY: Guilford Press. pp 67-95.

Murphy, J. (2004). *Leadership for literacy.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2013). *What proportions of student groups are reaching proficient?* (2013). Retrieved February 7, 2015 from: http://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading_math_2013/#/student-groups

National Early Literacy Panel. (2008). *Developing early literacy: report of the national early literacy panel.* Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy. Retrieved October 1, 2014, from: http://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/NELPReport09.pdf

National Reading Panel. (2000). *A report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching children to read.* Washington, DC: National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Retrieved September 20, 2014, from: http://www.nichd.nih.gov/publications/pubs/nrp/Documents/report.pdf

Pardo, L. S. (2004). What every teacher needs to know about comprehension. *The Reading Teacher, 58*(3), 272-280. Retrieved November 29, 2014, from https://login.ezproxy.etsu.edu:3443/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/203278923?accountid=10771

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Payne, R. (1998). *A framework for understanding poverty* (Rev. ed.). Baytown, Tex.: RFT.

Pearson, P.D. (2000). Reading in the twentieth century. *Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, 99*, 152-208.

Perez, M., & Socias, M. (2008). Highly successful schools: What do they do differently and at what cost? *Education Finance and Policy, 3*, 109-129. Retrieved January 1, 2015, from http://r.search.yahoo.com/_ylt=AwrBT8rxrOdUuW8AKs5XNyoA;_ylu=X3oDMTByOHZyb21tBGNvbG8DYmYxBHBvcwMxBHZ0aWQDBHNlYwNzcg--/RV=2/RE=1424498034/RO=10/RU=http%3a%2f%2fweb.stanford.edu%2fgroup%2ffirepp%2fcgi-bin%2fjoomla%2fdocman%2fhighly-successful-schools%2fdownload.html/RK=0/RS=xYaKsI1yaiMh9mvkRpodMn0.Ze8-

Pressley, M. (1998). *Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced teaching.* New York, NY: Guilford.

Pressley, M., & Allington, R. (2014). *Reading instruction that works: The case for balanced teaching* (4th ed.). New York, NY. Guilford.

Pressley, M., Allington, R.L., Wharton-McDonald, R., Block, C.C., & Morrow, L.M. (2001). *Learning to read: Lessons from exemplary first-grade classrooms*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Pullen, P. C., Lane, H. B., Lloyd, J. W., Nowak, R., & Ryals, J. (2005). Effects of explicit instruction on decoding of struggling first grade students: A data-based case study. *Education & Treatment of Children, 28*(1), 63-75. Retrieved November 15, 2014, from https://login.ezproxy.etsu.edu:3443/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/202674331?accountid=10771

Rasinski, T. (2012). Why reading fluency should be hot. *Reading Teacher*, *65*(8), 516-522. doi: 10.1002/TRTR.01077

Ravitch, D. (2000). *Left back*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Sanders, W.L. & Rivers, J.C. (1996). *Cumulative and residual effects of teachers on future student academic achievement* [Research Progress Report by University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center]. Retrieved October 15, 2012, from http://www.cgp.upenn.edu/pdf/Sanders_Rivers-TVASS_teacher%20effects.pdf

Schmoker, M. (2007). Radically redefining literacy instruction: An immense opportunity. *Phi Delta Kappan, 88*(7), 488-493. Retrieved October 14, 2014, from https://login.ezproxy.etsu.edu:3443/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/218479639?accountid=10771

Snow, C. E., Burns, M. S., & Griffin, P. (Eds.). (1998). *Preventing reading difficulties in young children.* Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Snow, C. E., & Juel, C. (2005). Teaching children to read: What do we know about how to do it? *In*: M. J. Snowling & C. Hulme (Eds.), *The science of reading: A handbook* (pp. 501–520). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Spring, J. (2011). *The politics of American education*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Stahl, S., & Hayes, D.A. (1997). *Instructional models in reading*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Stahl, S. A. (1992). Saying the "P" word: Nine guidelines for exemplary phonics instruction. *The Reading Teacher, 45*(8), 618-625. Retrieved September 9, 2014, from https://login.ezproxy.etsu.edu:3443/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/58249992?accountid=10771

Stahl, S. A., (1999). Why innovations come and go (and mostly go): The case of whole language *Educational Researcher, 28: 13-22,* doi:10.3102/0013189X028008013

Stanovich, K.E. (2000). *Progress in understanding reading: Scientific foundations and new frontiers*. New York, NY: Guilford.

Stronge, J. (2011). *Effective teachers = student achievement: What the research says*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Taylor, B.M., Pressley, M., & Pearson, D.P. (2002). Research-supported characteristics of teachers and schools that promote reading achievement. Retrieved July 16, 2014, from: http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/HE/mf_readingachievement.pdf

U.S. Department of Education. (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform*. Retrieved January 15, 2015, from: http://www2.ed.gov/pubs/NatAtRisk/risk.html

U.S. Department of Education. (2002). *No child left behind*. Retrieved September 20, 2014, from: http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/execsumm.html

U.S. Department of Education (2004) *Glossary of terms -- no child left behind*. Retrieved November 11, 2014, from: http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/index/az/glossary.html#2

U.S. Department of Education. (2009). *Reading first*. Retrieved September 20, 2014, from: http://www2.ed.gov/programs/readingfirst/index.html

U.S. Department of Education. (2010). *A blueprint for reform: The reauthorization of the elementary and secondary education act*. (2010). Retrieved September 19, 2014, from: http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/blueprint.pdf

U.S. Department of Education. (2011). *Title I: Improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged*. Retrieved September 19, 2014, from: http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg1.html

U.S. Department of Education. (2013*). Statement of U.S. secretary of education arne duncan on the 2013 NAEP reading and mathematics report card*. Retrieved January 6, 2015, from http://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/statement-us-secretary-education-arne-duncan-2013-naep-reading-and-mathematics-report-card

Vellutino, F., Fletcher, J., Snowling, M., & Scanlon, D. (2004). Specific reading disability (dyslexia): What have we learned in the past four decades?. *Journal Of Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, *45*(1), 2-40. doi:10.1046/j.0021-9630.2003.00305.x

Vellutino, F. R., Scanlon, D. M., Sipay, E. R., Small, S. G., Pratt, A., Chen, R., & Denckla, M. B. (1996). Cognitive profiles of difficult-to-remediate and readily remediated poor readers: Early intervention as a vehicle for distinguishing between cognitive and experiential deficits as basic causes of specific reading disability. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *88*(4), 601-638. doi:10.1037/0022-0663.88.4.601

Virginia Department of Education. (2007). *Responsive instruction: refining our work of teaching all children.* Retrieved October 18, 2014, from: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/instruction/virginia_tiered_system_supports/response_intervention/responsive_instruction.pdf

Virginia Department of Education. (2014). *Accountability in Virginia Public Schools*. Retrieved October 18, 2014, from: http://www.doe.virginia.gov/statistics_reports/school_report_card/accountability_guide.pdf

Virginia Department of Education. (2014). *Virginia standards predicated the common core*. *Knowledge Quest, 42*(3), 16-19. Retrieved October 18, 2014, from: https://login.ezproxy.etsu.edu:3443/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1472010226?accountid=10771

Walczyk, J. J., & Griffith-Ross, D. (2007). How important is reading skill fluency for comprehension? *The Reading Teacher, 60*(6), 560-569. Retrieved September 20, 2014, from: https://login.ezproxy.etsu.edu:3443/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/203281739?accountid=10771

Wanzek, J., Roberts, G., Al Otaiba, S., & Kent, S. (2014). The relationship of print reading in Tier I instruction and reading achievement for kindergarten students at risk of reading difficulties. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, *37*(3), 148-160. Retrieved from: doi:10.1177/0731948713518334

Webb, L. D. (2006). *The history of American education: A great American experiment*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Williamson, R., & Blackburn, B. (2010). *Rigorous schools and classrooms: Leading the way*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Whitaker, T. (2012). *What great teachers do differently: Seventeen things that matter most* (2nd ed.). Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Zoch, M., Langston-DeMott, B., & Adams-Budde, M. (2014). Creating digital authors. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *96*(3), 32-37.

Zumeta, R. O., Compton, D. L., & Fuchs, L. S. (2012). Using word identification fluency to monitor first-grade reading development. *Exceptional Children, 78*(2), 201-220. Retrieved January 2, 2015, from: https://login.ezproxy.etsu.edu:3443/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/916923335?accountid=10771

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Elementary Educators' Perceptions of Practices that Contribute to Literacy Achievement

Interview Questions

1. What is your personal philosophy of reading instruction? What factors influenced this philosophy?

2. What literacy programs, resources, or strategies are currently being implemented in your grade level or area of instruction?

3. Which of these programs, resources, or strategies do you perceive as contributing to reading achievement? How, or in what ways?

4. Are there programs, resources, or strategies in your district, school, or grade level that you perceive as *not* contributing to reading achievement? Which ones and why?

5. How do you approach the literacy learning of your struggling readers?

6. Do you have students with disabilities in your classroom? How do you approach their literacy learning?

7. Do you have economically disadvantaged students in your classroom? How do you approach their literacy learning?

8. Do you have gifted students in your classroom? How do you approach their literacy learning?

9. What is your expectation for level of year-end reading achievement for each group: low, average, and high readers?

10. Are there additional factors you believe contribute to reading achievement?

APPENDIX B

IRB Approval

IRB APPROVAL – Initial Expedited Review

February 9, 2015

Sherry King

Re: Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Practices that Contribute to Literacy Achievement

IRB#: c0215.1s

ORSPA #: n/a

The following items were reviewed and approved by an expedited process:
* xform New Protocol Submission; External Site Permission; Informed Consent Document (version 1/30/2015, stamped approved 2/9/2015); Email Script (stamped approved 2/9/2015); Demographic Sheet; Interview Questions; References; CV

On **February 9, 2015**, a final approval was granted for a period not to exceed 12 months and

will expire on **February 8, 2016**. The expedited approval of the study will be reported to the

convened board on the next agenda.

The following **enclosed stamped, approved Informed Consent Documents** have been stamped with the approval and expiration date and these documents must be copied and provided to each participant prior to participant enrollment:

- Informed Consent Document (version 1/30/2015, stamped approved 2/9/2015)

Federal regulations require that the original copy of the participant's consent be maintained in the principal investigator's files and that a copy is given to the subject at the time of consent.

Projects involving Mountain States Health Alliance must also be approved by MSHA following IRB approval prior to initiating the study.

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others must be reported to the IRB (and VA R&D if applicable) within 10 working days.

Accredited Since December 2005

Proposed changes in approved research cannot be initiated without IRB review and approval. The only exception to this rule is that a change can be made prior to IRB approval when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the research subjects [21 CFR 56.108 (a)(4)]. In such a case, the IRB must be promptly informed of the change following its implementation (within 10 working days) on Form 109 (www.etsu.edu/irb). The IRB will review the change to determine that it is consistent with ensuring the subject's continued welfare.

Sincerely,

Stacey Williams, PhD

Chair, ETSU Campus IRB

VITA

SHERRY S. KING

Education: East Tennessee State University
                             Educational Leadership, Ed.D, May 2015

                             Emory & Henry College
                             Reading, M.A.Ed., 2006

                             Radford University
                             Educational Leadership, M.S., 2003

                             Emory & Henry College
                             Early Childhood Education, B.A., 1988

Professional Experience: Principal, High Point Elementary School, 2012-Present
                             Washington County Virginia Public Schools

                             Principal, Greendale Elementary School, 2006-2012
                             Washington County Virginia Public Schools

                             Coordinator of Federal Programs and Grants, 2004-2006
                             Washington County Virginia Public Schools

                             Teacher, High Point Elementary School, 1997-2004
                             Washington County Virginia Public Schools

                             Teacher, Marion Primary School, 1989-1994
                             Smyth County Virginia Public Schools

Professional Organizations: National Association of Elementary School Principals
                             Virginia Association of Elementary School Principals
                             International Literacy Association
                             Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
                             Phi Delta Kappa

Honors and Awards   National Distinguished Principal, 2013
                             National Title I Distinguished School Award, 2014