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Summer School: Perceptions of Summer School Teachers in a Northeast Tennessee School
District

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

Kari Alison Witcher Arnold

May 2013

Dr. James Lampley (Chair)

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Keywords: summer school, student success, effective summer schools

ABSTRACT

Summer School: Perceptions of Summer School Teachers in a Northeast Tennessee School

District

by

Kari Alison Witcher Arnold

The requirements of various educational reform movements such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top have left public education systems searching for ways to make sure students are reaching their highest potential. Because of the importance of accountability issues to school systems, it is important to examine ways to help students reach their potential. One tool school districts use to aid in improving student achievement is summer school.

This qualitative study provides an overview of the history of summer school. Additionally, it offers a synopsis of various types of summer programs and populations often targeted by summer school. The researcher also offers a review of literature on student learning loss over the summer months.

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of pre-K through third grade summer school teachers' about the summer program in which they taught. The study emphasis was on preparation for summer school, analysis of teacher effectiveness, evaluation of the program, and teacher attitudes toward students.

The participants in this study were 10 summer school teachers from a school system in northeast Tennessee. The analysis of data collected in this study introduced several themes and common patterns. Participants expressed the importance of being able to see changes in students over the

course of their time in school. The value of participating in a summer school program that is different from the regular school year was found to be important to the teachers. Emphasizing that flexibility in pedagogy and fun for the students was important in making summer school successful.

Participants reported that small class size aided in their ability to help the students reach their potentials. Summer school teachers in the study were found to value not just the academic activities but also enrichment activities for students during the summer program. Participants also related antidotal stories and shared situations in which summer school was helpful for particular students. These responses illustrate the significance of seeking teachers' perceptions of the work they are doing.

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DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to all educators who are committed to do their best with every child. I have been deeply blessed by all my students. I consider it a joy to work daily in the field of education. A special thank you to all of my teachers from preschool through this doctoral program; I have been blessed with the best.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my family and friends who have encouraged me along this doctoral journey. To my husband I am very thankful for your love and support.

I owe my deepest gratitude to my parents. Words will never be enough to say thank you for the love and encouragement you have offered me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Because of federal and state laws, public schools are facing pressures related to student achievement. In the wake of educational reform, school districts across the nation are looking for ways to improve student achievement. It is imperative that school districts create meaningful educational experiences to increase student learning and achievement. There are several laws influencing school and state reforms.

One reform that has increased the pressure on schools and school districts is the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 (2002). Federal lawmakers approved the bill in an effort to motivate states to strengthen their assessment and accountability systems. In addition to increased accountability, school districts face consequences for poor test scores of specific subgroups of students (Williams et al., 2005). Thus, the pressure for states and school districts to improve schools and student achievement increased, and they have begun seeking out creative ways to meet the accountability standards.

President Obama's administration has created a competitive grant system to encourage states to take initiative to improve their schools. Race to the Top (RTTT) Grants worth \$4.35 billion were awarded in 2010 (Hershberg & Robertson-Kraft, 2010). To be considered for a grant states must include four initiatives: 1) Rigorous standards, 2) Internationally benchmarked assessments, 3) Using data to track students and teachers, and 4) Teacher improvement. However, the greatest emphasis for grant applications is placed on teacher quality and improvement.

Another reform facing states and school districts is the adoption of the Common Core State Standards. The standards are in language arts and math with the purpose of preparing

students for college and the workforce. To date, all but five states have adopted the standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010). In 2010, the United States Department of Education announced plans to spend up to \$350 million over the next 4 years for comprehensive exams for elementary and high school students based on Common Core State Standards (Toch & Tyre, 2010).

With the increased pressure on school districts and states, summer school is often seen as a possible solution to help students who are not making adequate learning gains. Districts across the nation spend millions of dollars every year on summer school for students (Yeh, 2010). The words “summer school” invokes images of academic torment and a poor way to spend a summer vacation. However, school districts are searching for ways to remediate students, improve student achievement, and offer enrichment activities. Fairchild and Smink (2010) raised some interesting ideas:

In many ways, the summer months are the last frontier of school reform. Despite extensive research confirming the existence of a summer slide in learning among all students, and a recent study showing that two-thirds of the achievement gap in reading is directly related to unequal summer learning opportunities, the summer months have been largely ignored by policymakers and reformers alike. (p. 42)

It is estimated that about 5 million students, (10% of the students attending elementary through high school) were enrolled in summer school. Based on national trends, summer school attendance is expected to grow over the next few decades. The first trend is the need for child care programs during the summer months because of an increase in single parent households and households with both parents who work outside the home. A growing trend has policymakers expressing a concern about the global competitiveness of our education system. There is also an increased emphasis on higher academic standards and competency requirements. With such large numbers of summer school attendees, these students can be seen as fertile ground among

educators who are eager to remediate, improve student achievement, and offer enrichment activities (Cooper & Educational Resources Information Center, 2001).

School districts across the nation have set aside monies and are partnering with nonprofit organizations by using community resources to create summer programs. In 2010 Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, dedicated over \$10 million of ARRA funds for a Summer Dreamers Academy. The Academy included a 5-week program that focused on literacy and enrichment activities. Also in 2010 Baltimore, Maryland, introduced a new summer program (STEM) focusing on science, technology, engineering, math, and youth development. Cincinnati, Ohio, used ARRA funds to create the Fifth Quarter, which was a 4-week full-day summer program for low performing elementary schools. Dallas Independent School District in Dallas, Texas, partnered with Big Thought, a nonprofit organization, to create Thriving Minds Summer Camp in 2010 (Smink, 2011).

Background of the Study

Summer school programs are used across the nation to remediate and enrich a spectrum of students. School systems across the nation use summer programs for various purposes. These programs can give teachers the opportunity to provide instruction in more innovative and creative ways than is typically used during the traditional school year. The goal of summer programs may be varied, but all attempt to provide quality instruction outside the traditional school calendar.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of pre-Kindergarten through third grade summer school teachers about the summer program in which they taught. The study

emphasis was on preparation for summer school, analysis of teacher effectiveness, evaluation of the program, and teacher attitudes toward students.

Significance of the Study

School districts around the nation provide summer programs to meet the needs of their students. Increased pressure from all stakeholders to make sure students are meeting state mandated goals have forced schools to look at summer programs and meet these expectations. Gaining a perspective about the work teachers do with students in summer programs may help districts offer more effective summer school programs.

Research Questions

Two introductory questions were used to begin the participant interviews:

1. What was your motivation for teaching summer school?
2. How did teaching summer school make a difference in your teaching career?

Four research questions provided the focus for this study:

1. How do you know the teaching strategies implemented during summer school were effective and how did you evaluate your teaching strategies?
2. Which organizational strategies implemented while teaching summer school were the most effective?
3. What changes could school districts make in order to make summer school more effective?
4. How did your participation as a teacher in summer school make a long-term difference in students' educational outcome?

Key Terms

There are several key terms used throughout this study. To clarify meaning, terminology specific to the field is defined here.

Audit Trail: The ability to walk readers through the research project from beginning to end so that they can trust the process and the outcomes (O'Donoghue, 2007).

Purposeful Sample: Selecting a group of participants who meet criteria (McMilan & Schumacher, 2010).

In-Depth Interview: Use open-ended questions to gather data on participants' meanings and how they make sense of the events being investigated (McMilan & Schumacher, 2010).

Interview Guide: Topics and questions are outlined in advance. The researcher determines the sequence and wording during each interview (McMilan & Schumacher, 2010).

Member Checking: Participant review of notes and recordings for accuracy (McMilan & Schumacher, 2010).

Network Sampling: Asking participants in the study for referral to other participants. This is also known as snowball sampling (McMilan & Schumacher, 2010).

Open-Coding: Breaking down data and examining them to draw out key concepts or themes (O'Donoghue, 2007).

Participant Review: Having the participant review the transcript of their interview. The participant is asked to modify any information from the interview data for accuracy (McMilan & Schumacher, 2010).

Phenomenological Study: A study that describes the meaning of a lived experience (McMilan & Schumacher, 2010).

Semistructured Interview Format: The questions being asked have no preset choices. Rather, the participant shares his or her own individual response.

Validity: Refers to the degree of congruence between the explanation of the phenomena and the realities of the world (McMilan & Schumacher, 2010).

Scope of the Study

I conducted a qualitative study by collecting data through personal interviews with pre-Kindergarten through third grade summer school teachers. The study targeted 10 summer school teacher participants in a school district in Northeast Tennessee.

Limitations

There are several limitations in this study. The small number of participants is considered a limitation. Another limitation is all participants are employed by the same school system in Northeast Tennessee. Because this study was conducted in only one school district, the findings may not be applicable to other settings in the United States. Another limitation of this study is that I work in the same school system where I conducted the study, which may imply bias. Additionally, because I work in a school where summer school is held, my personal experience may be a limitation.

Overview of the Study

This study was used to evaluate the perceptions of teachers involved in summer school programs and the difference they note that summer school makes with students. By using qualitative research methods for the study, the participants' perceptions provided greater insight into the depth of the noted influence of summer programs on students. Chapter 1 offers an introduction to the study explaining the background, statement of the purpose, significance,

definition of key terms, and research questions. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the history of summer school, a review of the literature including the summer learning loss, various types of summer schools, and specific populations that are targeted to attend summer school. Research methods are described in Chapter 3 including the selection of participants, research design, recruiting and ethical protocol, and data collection. Chapter 4 reports the data collected in the study. Chapter 5 holds the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for practice and future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

It has been suggested that American school year schedules include a summer vacation because their calendar mirrors the cycle of traditional agrarian life. Students were needed at home to help their families with their agricultural endeavors during the summer months (Gold, 2002b). However, a closer look at school calendars reveals that historically the calendars have changed to meet the needs of each community. For example, urban schools in densely populated areas were operating almost 12 months a year while the rural schools were open only a few months at a time so that students could help with work on the family farm (Schulte, 2009).

Gold (2002b) suggested there are four phases of public summer school. The first movement was in the early 19th Century when the K-12 education system included summer terms. In the middle and late 19th Century, summer was removed from the school calendar as school schedules were synchronized across the country. In 1892 the United States Commissioner of Education William Harris reported that some urban school calendars were actually shrinking. For example, New York City went from 245 school days in 1842 to 202.5 days in 1892. In the early 20th Century, summer school returned in the form of vacation school. Also during the 20th Century, the school calendar reached a standard of 180 school days for students. Following interruptions due to the Great Depression and World War II, in the mid 20th Century, summer schools returned in various forms to serve the public interest (Gold, 2002a).

The history of summer school is closely connected to the history of school calendars. Public school calendars have undergone and are still undergoing many changes in the last 200 years. Horace Mann (as cited in Gold, 2002a) issued an influential school report in 1842 that urged educators to standardize their school calendars. He emphasized that rural schools needed

to extend their school year to emphasize regular school attendance and urban schools needed to shorten their school calendar. His recommendation was that the standardized school year, which offered a substantial summer break, would allow the students a time to rest and enter their next school year with more enthusiasm. Furthermore, Mann suggested that a student's health could be compromised by overstimulation of their mind through intense study. Summer break supporters had experts including medical doctors who published reports and discussions about the need for student summer breaks to protect the child's health. Mann also suggested that teachers needed breaks to extend their learning and to rest (Gold, 2002a).

At the turn of the 20th Century when immigrants were flocking to the United States and people were leaving rural areas for the city, urban leaders were concerned for children when schools were not in session. Facing a summer vacation that was increasing in length and with urban environments that were less than ideal for young minds, vacation schools were created. Started by woman's clubs, settlement groups, and businessmen, vacation schools opened during the summer months. The schools began in the northeast and spread across the country in the first few decades of the 20th Century (Gold, 2002b). The shift in implementation of vacation schools in the late 19th and early 20th Century is in contrast to the Horace Mann movement where summer school was thought to be detrimental to a student's health and well-being. The vacation movement was born out of a desire to ease community crowding, combat juvenile delinquency, and assimilate immigrant children. Additionally, in 1916 the first child labor laws were passed so that children were no longer allowed to work during the summer vacation months (Dougherty, 1981).

Initially, vacation schools were more of an organized recreation time for urban students that focused on play and recreation. Vacation schools were also a private endeavor that was not

part of the public school system. In 1894 Club E instituted its first vacation schools in New York (Gold, 2002a). Reverend William Locke suggested that the vacation schools would, “Give them three hours a day of practical training in the lines of work for which the ordinary teacher has not the time to spare, and to give them discipline and personal supervision which the children remaining in the city during the summer stand in so much need of” (Gold, 2002a, p. 24). Locke became the superintendant of the New York City summer schools and was criticized for targeting poor students and trying to convert students who were non-Christian. However, for most school districts the nature of the vacation school changed over the years. By 1898 the New York City school district took over vacation schools. Furthermore, by 1910 vacation schools were much more academic in nature and the focus on play was long forgotten; many of the vacation schools were used to remediate failing students (Gold, 2002a).

During the mid to late 20th Century, summer learning opportunities were still a part of the American education system. During World War II, summer schools were needed to help with child care as many American women were working, especially in towns that had defense factories. In 1957, when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the United States reconsidered the state of its current public educational system. Passing the National Education Defense Act in 1958, congress emphasized the study of math, science, and foreign language and many school districts used the new funding for summer educational activities (Gold, 2002a). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 promoted summer programs for students in poverty. The first year of Head Start projects was in 1965 and included summer programs (Gold, 2002a). In 1997 the Individuals with Disability Act (IDEA) eventually included a free extended school year for student with disabilities. *A Nation at Risk* from the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE, 1983) encouraged school districts to consider summer

programs. At the turn of the 21st Century, many school districts were mandating summer schools for failing students and some districts required attendance in order for the student to be promoted to the next grade (Gold, 2002a).

Almost 100 years later educators were still trying to use summer school to remediate, enrich, and improve student achievement. Cooper and the Educational Resources Information Center (2001) suggested that,

The push for more summer learning opportunities for children and adolescents will gather momentum from changes in the American family, and from a focus on increasing the time children spend in formal education as a means of meeting higher academic standards, and improving America's global economic position. (pg. 1)

Commissioner of Education Arne Duncan suggested in a 2009 speech to Denver students, "I think schools should be open six, seven days a week, eleven, twelve months a year" (as cited in Schulte, 2009, pg. 19).

Summer Slide

One justification for summer school is that students often forget learned material during the summer months, which is often called the *summer slide* (Cooper, Charlton, Valentine, & Borman, 2000). President Obama (2009) stated, "Like an athlete out of practice, a child who takes long breaks from learning can face academic setbacks. The problem is especially prominent during the summer, when students lose more than two months of progress" (p. 1). Numerous factors must be considered when researchers examine the influence of a summer vacation on student learning. Educational outcomes could be transformed by considering the data related to families and seasonal schedule effects on student learning (Borman, Benson, & Overman, 2005).

A study combining more than 39 studies suggested that the effects of summer vacation on achievement test scores equals at least the loss of 1 month of instruction (Cooper, Nye, Charlton,

Lindsay, & Greathouse, 1996). Additionally the Cooper et al. (1996) study found significant differences on the effect of summer vacation in various academic areas. Summer learning loss was greater for math than for reading while spelling showed larger losses than other subject areas. Several other components were examined during the meta-analysis. One component revealed that intelligence had little impact on the effect of the summer break. Additionally, student gender and ethnicity also appeared to have a relationship to summer learning loss. Family economics seemed to reveal that all students lost equal amounts of math skills over the summer. Differences were also found for reading; on some measures, middle income groups showed gains in reading achievement over summer while low income students showed a loss. Reading comprehension scores for both middle and low income students showed a loss, but low income students showed a greater loss (McCombs et al., 2011).

A longitudinal study (Smith, 2011) that tracked students from Baltimore City Schools from first grade through age 22 examined summer learning loss. More than 800 students were tested in the fall and spring to track achievement patterns. The findings suggested that low income children and middle income children made the same amount of progress during the school year. However, during the summer months the low income students' reading skills deteriorated. The researchers determined that two thirds of the ninth grade reading achievement gap between high and low income students can be attributed to unequal access to summer learning during the elementary years (Smith, 2011).

Entwisle, Alexander, and Olson (2001) developed the *faucet theory* that suggested that when school is in session the resource faucet is running for all students, and all students make equal academic gains. However, when school is not in session and the faucet is turned off over summer vacation, low income families cannot compensate for the resources the school has been

providing; therefore, their child's learning stays the same or declines. In contrast, middle income families have other resources to make up for the school's resources during summer vacation and often their student's learning continues but usually at a slower pace (Borman et al., 2005, p. 133).

Heynes (1978) tracked nearly 3,000 Atlanta, Georgia, middle grade students over 2 years. The students took achievement tests in May and October of each school year. Furthermore, she surveyed their parents to determine their socioeconomic status and interviewed 500 students to understand how they spent the summer. Heynes found that students of all income levels and ethnicities learned at slower rates over the summer than during the school year. Advantaged students continued to make academic gains while disadvantaged students tended to make no learning gains or suffered a learning loss (Heynes, 1978). One shortcoming of the study was that achievement tests were administered in October and May giving the students in Heynes's study almost 2 months of instruction for the tests that were to reflect summer learning loss (Viadero, 1994).

Burkman, Ready, Lee, and LoGerfo (2004) found that students from higher socioeconomic groups made greater learning gains over the summer than less advantaged students. Dougherty (1996) concluded that there were two ideas related to summer learning with the first being that prior to high school the achievement gap by family socioeconomic status is related to unequal learning opportunities in the child's home and community. The second conclusion was based on learning gains being relatively equal during the school year; therefore, the disparity in the achievement gap could be traced to out-of-school experiences or the lack thereof (Dougherty, 1996).

Downey, VonHippel, and Broh (2004) offered that the reading achievement level of a child of low socioeconomic status whose family's yearly household income was \$40,000 fell 2.5 months behind the achievement level of those students whose family's yearly household income was \$100 thousand. Burkman et al. (2004) found an achievement gap difference in socioeconomic family status between kindergarten and first grade. The results of their data examination suggested that the relationship between socioeconomic status and a student's summer learning is not linear. Rather, the most significant learning disparities occur in the highest and lowest quintiles of the socioeconomic status distribution among the very rich or the very poor (Borman & Dowling, 2006).

Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson (2007) were encouraged to examine learning because of a Baltimore newspaper headline that read *Pupils Lose Ground in the City Schools: The Longer Children Stay in the System, the More They Fall Behind* (Holmes, 1997). The article compared first through fifth grade reading and math achievement scores to the national average. The researchers dissected the data on a seasonal basis. When they compared the Baltimore data spring to spring the lower socioeconomic youth fell below the upper socioeconomic youth. Upper socioeconomic children's scores improved during the summer months while lower socioeconomic students lost ground in the summers after first and second grade and gained very little following third and fourth grade (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2001).

Alexander et al. (2007) used Baltimore Summer School data to offer the following suggestions related to summer learning. Because of unequal learning environments among socioeconomic groups of kindergartners, many disadvantaged students begin school behind because of their out-of-school environment. The same unequal patterns still affect students when they enter school and that continues to contribute to the achievement gap between low

socioeconomic and middle socioeconomic students. Furthermore, Alexander et al. (2007) suggested that these compounded learning differences among the socioeconomic groups in the early years manifest themselves in ninth grade curriculum placement, high school completion, and even future college attendance. Borman and Dowling (2006) suggested in regard to the Baltimore Summer School data,

By middle school, these summer reading losses, plus a relatively small initial achievement lag at the beginning of first grade produced a cumulative lag of two years in reading achievement, despite the fact that the lower and higher [socio-economic status] children learned at essentially the same rate in school. (Lips, 2009)

With many of the studies regarding summer learning loss, achievement testing is used to measure student learning. However, during summer months students are often engaged in enrichment activities that may not be measurable. For example, students take violin lessons, receive painting instruction, or even visit a museum, and while most would agree that these activities are beneficial, they are not necessarily academically measurable (Viadero, 1994). Furthermore, perhaps the learning that is lost is not significant when taken into consideration that the information lost could be what was taught at the beginning of the school year possibly in August and September. According to Hoy and Miskal (2008) schools are just one part of our society, “Because school organizations are conceptualized as part of a larger universe or environment, an argument can be made that anything that happens in the larger environment may affect schools and vice versa” (p. 256).

Goals for Summer Schools

School districts use summer school for various reasons. In some school districts summer school is an intervention. A significant reason for summer school is as academic remediation. Some school districts remand students to summer school if they fail state mandated tests.

Summer school is used in the high school world to help decrease dropout rates. High school students who are behind in the number of credits can attend summer school to earn those credits.

Students with disabilities are often encouraged to attend summer school to curtail summer learning loss, which can often be more pronounced in students with learning issues. When the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized in 1997, it required that summer programs be provided to the student at no cost to the parents. Student attendance was to be decided by the educational team and parents. The purpose of offering summer programs was to keep this population of students from losing the educational gains they made during the school year (Cooper et al., 2000).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 included funds for closing the achievement gap between the rich and the poor. Section 1001 referred to monies “used to ensure that children have full access to effective high quality regular school programs and receive supplemental help through extended time activities” (ESEA, 1965). The Title I mandate has led to many school districts using these funds to support summer school.

Another use of summer school is for student enrichment. So much of the school year is spent meeting standards and passing tests that little time is left to expose students to enrichment activities. Conant (1959) suggested that summer for high school students needs to be a time to engage in enrichment activities that they cannot fit into their regular academic school schedule.

Summer School for At-Risk Students

For the purpose of this study, there are several reasons that a student may be deemed *at-risk*. One criterion would be if he or she failed a course or a state mandated exam. Another criteria for the *at risk* label would be that a student is from a lower socioeconomic status. An additional criterion for labeling a student *at risk* is if the student’s performance is such that there

is the potential to not graduate from high school. Many studies have demonstrated student learning loss during the summer. The effect of being economically disadvantaged on learning, especially during the summer months, has spurred more research on developing summer schools for at-risk students.

Not coincidentally, for the last 40 years the standard's movement has coincided with more school districts implementing summer learning opportunities to allow failing students to move to the next grade (Keiler, 2010). Furthermore, Keiler suggested that especially large urban school districts with documented low graduation rates who serve mostly disadvantaged students are using summer remedial programs. According to Stone, Engel, Nagaoka, and Roderick (2005) increased use of high-stakes testing has been accompanied by an expansion of summer school programming. The key to making summer school effective for at-risk students is changing the learning conditions in contrast to the regular school year (Cale, 1992).

A case study of four students who failed their state biology exam in New York City Public Schools documented the student's perspective of summer school participation. The program operated for 6 weeks at a local university and included a school day consisting of class time, lab time, lunch, and tutoring. Once a week the students took a state practice exam. The teachers were from the local school district and were paired with a classroom tutor. All four students who participated in the interviews were minority students who had failed their state exam. One theme gleaned from student interviews was that the students said their summer school teachers made learning science fun. Another theme that appeared through interviews with the students was that they were more comfortable in the summer learning environment. All four students were able to pass their state exam following summer school (Keiler, 2010).

In Texas it was determined that students who did not master key concepts would not pass to the next grade. Considering the new statute, the district identified more than 4,000 students who would be retained. Thus, district officials created a summer session to remediate these students and hopefully promote them to the next grade. The summer session was organized to help students with individual remediation based on their test scores. The results were that 79% of junior high school students and 52% of high school students were promoted because of the summer intervention (Schyler & Turner, 1986).

In Missouri a nontraditional, flexible summer program was designed to target failing students in an effort to help them earn credits. Students who failed core courses by 10 points or less were eligible for the program. After students were identified, a meeting was set with the program coordinator, teacher, student, and the student's parents; a contract to regain the credit was negotiated. The teacher assigned work based on the student's learning needs. Tutors and teachers were available in the school library on a set schedule for 6 weeks. Students were required to attend 30 hours and complete their assignments based on the proficiency level the team had agreed upon. During the first summer, 90% of the students who followed through with the contract earned credit. During the second summer, over 95% earned credit. Furthermore, summer school participants' failing grades decreased by 50% in the year following summer school. Cale (1992) noted that students' graduation rates were not calculated so it has not been documented what the long-term effects of summer school were on the students.

Honors college students at the University of Central Arkansas designed a week-long summer camp called Neptune Academy for at-risk rising eighth grade students. They adopted the philosophy that, "Each of us is better off when we are all better off" (Corbitt, Wallace, Womack, & Russell, 2011, p. 152). Attendees were identified by their teachers as struggling learners. The

University students took a semester-long course prior to the summer camp as preparation for their endeavor. Attendees were exposed to lessons in history, science, and literature. While no formal data were gathered from this nontraditional summer program, anecdotal feedback from the middle school was positive in regard to students' attitudes toward learning (Corbitt et al., 2011).

Chicago students in grades three, six, and eight who did not earn the minimum score on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills were generally retained. However, the students were also offered a second chance to become proficient by attending a summer program called Summer Bridge. The 6-week program offered small class sizes and intense instruction in reading and math. Analysis suggested that students in the Summer Bridge program learned at a rate of two to three times higher than during the regular school year (Roderick, Engel, Nagaoka, & Consortium on Chicago School Research, 2003). Eighty-five percent of participants in the program were low-income with approximately 75% responding that they liked the summer school program better than the regular school term (Stone et al., 2005). Although many of the Summer Bridge participants were promoted to the next grade, they still remained behind their classmates in the grades that followed (Buchanan, 2007).

A Midwest school district was regulated under a statute entitled "No Social Promotion for Grades 4 and 8" (Brown, 2005, p. 3). The statute forced local school districts to create a set of promotional criteria based on student performance on the state's achievement tests. In this school district, failure to meet the proficiency requirements meant the students would be retained or they could attend and pass a summer program to pass to the next level. Thus the district was taking its summer school program from low stakes to high stakes in a matter of a year. Brown focused on the student's self-perception as a learner in the context of attending a mandated

summer school. At the onset of the program most students expressed a concern that they were going to “have to work really hard” (Brown, 2005, p. 8). At the conclusion of the program the teacher reported that the students were prepared for the next grade level and perhaps would have the skills to excel. Of the students who attended the program, “12 students increased their scores by one grade level,” “9 students stayed at the same grade level,” and “1 student dropped a grade level” (Brown, 2005, p. 10). Following summer school, the students described it as *fun* and that they “learned some new stuff” (Brown, 2005, p 12).

A traditional summer school program in New York was designed for failing seventh and eighth grade students to recover credit.. The program used direct instruction of science and math with no subject integration. However, because of low student motivation and poor attendance and discipline, summer curriculum was redesigned to be more engaging and interactive. During the first year of implementation, student referrals went from 38 the previous year to 2 during the first year of the new curriculum. Additionally, there was an increase in passing rates from 92% to over 98% (Hoppe, 2010).

Kelleher (2003) reported on the results of a summer school program using a transformational leadership model for enlisting new summer school teachers. The school principal was asked to find teachers who not only cared about helping students meet academic needs, but also social needs. The summer school was an intervention to help failing eighth graders become proficient in specific subject areas to be promoted to the ninth grade. The teachers began to develop a theme based on a nautical novel; embedded in the curriculum was the idea that students were the captains of their own ships. Also, as a part of the summer program the students built a ship, and with community help were able to test it to see if it would float. During the subsequent school year, all of the summer school students improved their

achievement test score gains from the previous year and their grades were also higher the following school year. The dropout rate for that summer school cohort decreased by 1.8% from the previous year (Kelleher, 2003).

Another qualifier for students being at risk is if they are likely to drop out of high school. These students often lack the confidence and have rarely experienced academic or social successes (Cuddapah, Masci, Smallwood, & Holland, 2008). Summer is a logical time to plan opportunities for these at risk children because it offers a different environment and circumstances other than what they experience during the regular school year (Kugler, 2001). Therefore, summer schools are often organized to help students gain skills needed to earn a high school diploma.

Cuddapah et al. (2008) described a program designed to improve high school success for an incoming ninth grade class where 17 at risk students were identified and a summer school program was designed specifically to focus on literacy and overall academic success. The summer school was organized with a team that included school administrators and university faculty. Participation in the program was voluntary; however, transportation was provided and students who participated received incentives such as restaurant gift cards. The first semester average of days missed following the summer intervention was 2.33. Participating English teachers rated the students on academic and social adjustment. The summer school attendees were rated as average on academic success as compared to their nonsummer school peers and were rated higher on social adjustment than their nonsummer school peers (Cuddapah et al., 2008).

Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU) was a program in Arkansas designed to prevent dropout among low income adolescents. The YOU program was designed to give students an

opportunity to work in a career field that interests them, combined with academic instruction in math and English, all the while living at a university. Of the 182 students who completed the program, more than 90% were still in school by their junior year of high school (Bass & Bass, 1992).

A peer-assisted learning program was designed to help a rural Canadian high school combat its growing dropout problem. The program was offered during the summer under the supervision of two teachers and six student peer tutors. Of the 50 students who participated, all were still enrolled in school the following semester. Ninety percent of the attendees reported that the program helped them in their current classes, while 80% of program attendees responded that the program helped them feel more confident in doing school work and encouraged them to work harder (Dwyer & Tilley, 2001).

In an urban school district in the Midwest, the graduation rate was 50% compared to the state rate of 76%. A summer intervention program was designed to curtail dropouts among incoming ninth graders. The program included tutoring and personal development. There were 140 ninth grade students observed with 75 participating in the summer program. Following the intervention there was no significant difference in either group's grade point average. Additionally, the program did not appear to have a significant influence regarding educational attitudes and commitment to staying in school (Sommers, Owens, & Pilawsky, 2009).

Home and community based disadvantages can influence a student's academic success (Entwisle & Alexander, 1992). Often students who are economically disadvantaged or who live in high poverty communities are labeled at risk. Many studies assess the influence of school on children; however, it is difficult to separate their home life from school as they influence each other (Entwisle & Alexander, 1992). Alexander et al. (2001) examined seasonal data from

Baltimore schools and offered insight into children from lower socioeconomic homes. Advantaged and disadvantaged youth made similar gains during the school year; however, over the summer months, the learning rate was different. Lower socioeconomic students generally made no gains over the summer break starting the school year where they had been the previous spring or even behind their spring levels of performance (Entwisle & Alexander, 1992). Therefore, districts across the nation organized summer programs to help combat the summer learning loss for disadvantaged youth.

The National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC) is a nonprofit organization based in Minnesota that developed a summer school program in the Minneapolis public schools. The program was born out of a failing summer program with little attendance or success. The program targeted lower socioeconomic students and was entitled *WalkAbout*. It was organized into learning *families* with a practical interactive curriculum. The families consist of a teacher, two college students, four high school students, and approximately 25 elementary students. Attendance for the summer program went from 50% to 90%. The qualitative data indicated that a majority of the students liked attending the school (Kielsmeier, 1996).

A 7-week summer camp study was designed for economically disadvantaged first graders. The focus of the summer camp was reading, but students also participated in other activities such as sports, art, and music. There were 72 students assigned to the camp (intervention) and 90 to the control group. After the program ended, the reading comprehension scores for students in the camp group improved 41%. The camp attendees maintained a 39% advantage for 3 months following the camp and at the end of the following school year were performing 18% better than the control group (Schacter & Jo, 2005).

Summer Advantage USA is a nonprofit organization in Indiana that offers summer programs to disadvantaged low income kindergarten through eighth grade students. The program lasted 5 weeks and employed only the highest quality teachers. Results of the intensive summer program in 2011 showed that the students gained 3 months growth in math and 2 months growth in language arts (Summer Advantage USA, 2012).

Boreman and colleagues reviewed the Teach Baltimore Summer Academy data regarding students who reliably attended for three summers. These students were from low income families. Following a third year of summer school attendance, students demonstrated an improvement of 50% of one grade level in vocabulary and 40% of one grade level in reading (Borman & Dowling, 2006).

Literacy in Summer School

Many summer programs are designed around improving student literacy. Educators have long valued the importance of reading in early grades and have seen the impact that poor reading skills have on children. One in six children who are not reading proficiently in third grade do not graduate from high school on time, which is a rate four times higher than that for proficient readers. For the lowest group, below basic readers, 23% of these children fail to finish high school (Hernandez & Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011).

Multiple student cohorts were followed in a summer program in the Pacific Northwest that bridges first to second grade. The 5-week program was offered to students who were not proficient in the spring on a literacy achievement exam. The students on average gained 5.8 words of reading fluency per minute more than nonparticipants. However, during the school year the summer school attendees' gains were at a slower pace than the pace of nonparticipants (Zvoch & Stevens, 2011).

Ninety-four preschool children participated in a 6-week summer literacy program with over 90% eligible for free or reduced priced meals. The students who participated were in the bottom quartile on end of the year literacy assessments. The students who attended summer school showed a 26% improvement over the nonattendeess. The most improved area was in rhyming measures with a 147% improvement over the control group (Edmonds, O'Donoghue, Spano, & Algozznie, 2009).

Summer School for Enrichment

Many students enroll in summer school for enrichment purposes. Particularly for gifted students, summer is a time when these students can be involved in specialized programs with a challenging curriculum. These programs can stimulate curiosity and introduce the student to new areas of interest. The summer environment is a time when gifted students can share with other gifted students in a specialized setting with instructors who are geared to working with advanced students (Enerson, 1993).

Gifted rising juniors in North Carolina are invited to apply to attend a 6-week residential summer program called Governor's School. The program focused on contemporary knowledge and theory. Governor's school students were compared to nonattending gifted students. On one assessment Governor's school attendees showed a greater understanding of global and national issues than nonattendeess. Also noteworthy, on an assessment of cognitive maturity, the Governor's school attendees outperformed the nonattendeess by a two to one margin (Milner et al., 2009).

Coleman and Cross (1993) studied five Governor's schools for the gifted across the state of Tennessee. Each of the five schools had its own curriculum: Arts, Humanities, International Studies, Science, and Tennessee Studies. The purpose of the schools varied from enrichment to

acceleration. Researchers developed a Student Attitude Questionnaire. The results of the questionnaire indicated that the Governor's schools promoted growth in academic achievement and social development (Coleman & Cross, 1993).

Stake and Mares (2005) studied 88 high school students in the Midwest who were involved in a summer science enrichment program and evaluated on the basis of science motivation and confidence. The researchers were particularly interested if the summer program attendees would maintain their excitement for science when the regular school year began. Students were more confident that they could achieve a successful career in science at the 7-month follow up than at the pretest administered before the summer program. On a quantitative measure, the students generally agreed that the science program led to positive change in them as students (Stake & Mares, 2005).

For several years gifted students have attended residential summer programs at Purdue University. Students attend classes for 7 hours a day and were taught by expert teachers who specialize in working with gifted students. The students lived in dormitories and participate in seminars, recreational activities, and field trips. The Purdue Research Team identified through interviews that students had unmet needs in their regular school program. The unmet needs fell into three categories: academic, social, and psychological. Gifted students emphasized peer relationships and meeting like-minded students (Enerson, 1993). Lenz and Burruss' 1994 study of gifted students enrolled in a summer residential program in the Midwest focused on academic acceleration and programs to encourage peer acceptance. The researchers found that the summer attendees discovered intellectual peers and social acceptance.

A summer academy in Oklahoma was developed to encourage students to enter health professions. Gifted students were targeted for attendance in the 6-week summer program. The

students took part in classroom instruction and clinical experiences. Program organizers surveyed past attendees to determine if they were involved in science related careers, Of the responders 88% chose to major in a science related field (Cavallo, Sullivan, Hall, & Bennett, 1999).

Hansen (1985) reported that many gifted students and their parents expressed the opinion that summer programs were very beneficial. With that in mind, gifted middle school students from Wisconsin were studied to determine if their self-concepts changed as a result of a 2-week summer program. The students were involved in a differentiated program focusing on academic achievement and social relationships. It was found that the younger of the middle school students made the most self concepts gains. Additionally, students who chose to live on campus made greater gains than those who commuted. As an additional tool, student writing samples were used. When describing themselves, students used three times as many positive than negative adjectives on the preprogram essay. After summer school, students used nine times as many positive-to-negative adjectives describing themselves (Hansen).

GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) was a program designed to encourage college attendance among students at low income schools. Louisiana GEAR UP partnered with Louisiana Tech University to create a week-long residential summer camp designed to encourage future college attendance and improve academic achievement. The program was designed for middle school students attending GEAR UP schools. The Academic Competency Evaluation Scale (ACES) was used to determine academic competencies. Results from the quantitative portion of the study showed that students improved in their math achievement but not in reading or science. In the areas of interpersonal skills and engagement, the attendees showed growth (Beer, LeBlanc, & Miller, 2008).

Summer School for Special Education Students

Most special education students are offered the option to attend summer school to combat the summer learning loss among that population. Tilley, Cox, and Staybrook (1986) found that special education students with disabilities such as hearing impairment lost skills at a rate similar to that of their nondisabled peers. However, students with more severe disabilities demonstrated severe learning loss in areas of academics, self-help, and motor skills. When they returned to school it took them longer to relearn those skills than their nondisabled peers. When IDEA was reauthorized in 1997 a portion of the legislation mandated that school districts provide the option for special education students to attend a summer school program at no cost to the student.

Through a collaborative effort of a school district and area university, students with disabilities were paired with university students to sample jobs on the university campus. For three weeks during the summer, the students were able to work in places such as the cafeteria, bookstore, mailroom, and campus offices. The goal of the program was not only to gain work experience for the students with disabilities and to help them gain social skills through the pairing with a university student. Interviews conducted with mentors and the students with disabilities revealed several themes. One of the themes that developed through the interviews was that the students with disabilities developed a strong feeling for what jobs they enjoyed and those they did not prefer. The university mentors were also enrolled in a class on cognitive disabilities and many of them stated that they learned more by working with students than what a book could teach them (Kames et al., 2004).

Special education students with a wide range of abilities in rural northeastern Arizona were offered the chance to attend a 5-day a week residential summer program that lasted approximately 7 weeks. Because of the varied educational and health needs, the summer

program staff went through intense training. Additionally, the staff reviewed all the students Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) on a weekly basis to make sure the students were working on their goals. The Brigance Diagnostic Inventory of Basic Skills/Grade Level Measure pretest and posttest indicated that the students on average gained one grade level by the end of the program (Foster & Gabel, 1986).

A program entitled High Hopes was developed in the northeast United States to work with student with disabilities who were also gifted in various areas. The 1-week summer institute was designed for students to apply their talent in a problem solving learning environment and interact with peers. The program began out of the concept that while working with students with disabilities, often too much time is focused on the disability or weakness and that overshadows the potential talents the student may possess. Through student interviews the researchers were able to evaluate the program and discern that the program had a positive effect on student confidence. Additionally, all but one of the students who participated in the summer program elected to participate in various clubs and organizations the school offered when they previously were not involved (Gentry & Neu, 1998).

Summer School for English Language Learners

The American student population in many schools is increasingly characterized by the presence of students from various ethnic, cultural, and language backgrounds (Garcia & Marquez, 1997). It has been predicted that by the year 2026 almost 25% of US students will have limited English proficiency (Garcia, 1994). According to Lawrence (2012) summer vocabulary loss for language minority homes is steeper than students in English homes. English Language Learner (ELL) students' exposure to their second language tends to be reduced over the summer months (Becker, Stanat, Baumert, & Lehmann, 2008). School districts that are held accountable

for student achievement are using summer school as a possible intervention to help ELL students reach their full potential.

The International Summer Academy was a 6-week program designed to offer students core academic courses in their native language. The purpose of the program was to help students make academic achievement gains. Even though the courses were taught in the students' primary language, the results showed that they increased their English listening, reading, and writing skills. As many as 94% of students indicated they would recommend the International Summer Academy to a friend (Garcia & Marquez, 1997).

Hur and Suh (2010) reported an intensive 2-week summer program was developed for ELL students with the purpose of helping them adjust to their new environment. The program offered reading, math, and writing classes for Kindergarten through 12th grade students and SAT preparation courses for high school students. Students in all grade levels made significant academic gains with the students in the SAT preparation group making the least gains.

A 3-week summer camp for ELL students was used to evaluate the effectiveness of explicit and implicit approaches to second language support. The results of the study suggested that a combination of both implicit and explicit support yields the greatest gains among the students. However, if only one mode can be used then explicit tends to yield greater results than implicit. Results of follow-up tests showed that the participants' scores tended to be somewhat higher than nonparticipants at the 3-month postintervention test (Stanat, Becker, Baumert, Ludtke, & Eckhardt, 2012).

The Arlington, Virginia, school district provided High Intensity Language Training (HILT) during the summer months to help ELL student transition to high school coursework. The program was designed for students to move from one step of language acquisition to the

next. The courses offered can be taken for full, partial, or no credit. Class sizes were limited to 20 or fewer with instruction limited to reading, writing, and math. The instruction was aligned to the Virginia state standards. Also, the student's native language was used for some or all course instruction. Of the students eligible for attendance to HILT, 59% attended with the school district providing transportation. Of the students who attended the HILT program, 67% were able to exit the program and 43% of HILT attendees advanced one proficiency level or more after summer school (Spaulding, Carolino, Amen, Smith, & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2004).

The Summer Program for English Language Learners (SPELL) was offered to Boston public school ELL students in grades 3 through 10 during the summer months who were at risk for grade retention and those ELL students who were in need of academic support. The SPELL program was a partnership between the University of Massachusetts Graduate School of Education and Boston Public Schools. The program took place on the university campus during July. The SPELL program offered a 10 to 1 student-teacher ratio with 83% of the students who began the SPELL program completing it and 90% of the students were promoted to the next grade (Spaulding et al., 2004).

Summer School for Pre-Kindergarten

Pre-Kindergarten programs are becoming a strategy for school districts especially when addressing disparities in school achievement (Doctors & Pre-K Now, 2007). Research indicates that students who participate in pre-Kindergarten programs show greater social and academic readiness for school. The greatest gains are linked to students who are the most disadvantaged (Garces, Thomas, & Currie, 2002). For typically developing children, the literature suggested that children who attended a pre-Kindergarten program displayed fewer behavioral problems and had a more positive student to teacher relationship (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2012).

Pre-Kindergarten students deemed at risk were offered the opportunity to attend STARS, a transition to kindergarten program in a southeastern city. The program focused on school routines, literacy, numeracy, and social competencies. The program included a full month of half-day studies. Results of the study showed that the STARS program eased the social transition of girls, whereas the results for boys were not significant. As compared to similar nonparticipants, the STARS participants were evaluated by their teachers as having better adapted to school routines than nonparticipants (Berlin, Dunning, & Dodge, 2011).

Pre-Kindergarten students from a high poverty urban school district were offered the opportunity to attend a summer school program. The program focused on word-level and text-level reading skills. The summer school used small class size with its 4-week program. When compared to a traditional summer program, the students who attended the focused program made significant gains in word reading and listening comprehension. Students from the focused program had the most growth in high frequency word growth as compared with the control group; there were no significant differences between the groups in oral reading fluency and vocabulary (Denton, Solari, Ciancio, Hecht, & Swank, 2010).

In Atlanta children from high poverty areas were extended the opportunity to attend pre-Kindergarten classes during the summer months. Approximately 25% of the participants spoke a language other than English. Participants made gains in expressive language skills, number skills, word recognition, story comprehension, and letter recognition. However, it is noted that the participants were still behind the national norm. Parents were encouraged to spend time reading to and talking to their children about school. Two thirds of parents reported that they engaged their children in conversations about school and half of the parents reported that they read to their children more than three times per week (Ponder, Rickman, & Henry, 2004).

Project Family Read is an educational pre-Kindergarten camp for students who are not enrolled in regulated child care. During the summer of 2003, 35 children participated in the program. For cognitive language profiles the students' age equivalent improvements averaged a gain of 15 months after the program, with every child enrolled in the program making at least some gains (Irvine & Franklin-Granville-Vance Partnership for Children, 2003). Similarly, Kinder Camp in the summer of 2001 saw an average gain of 19 months in cognitive language profiles for students who participated (Irvine, Franklin-Granville-Vance Partnership for Children, & Granville County Schools, 2001).

Students who were identified as being below grade level readers in Ontario, Canada, were offered the opportunity to participate in a summer literacy program. The students were required to participate with one caregiver. Fourteen children participated in the 5-week summer literacy program. The program focused on print awareness, phoneme awareness, and letter-sound knowledge. Participants worked on strategies to improve literacy while their caregivers participated in workshops focusing on early literacy. Pre- and posttest analysis revealed that there was a statistically significant increase in all three areas. However, with no control group, no inference can be made as to the strength of the intervention program (Graham, McNamara, & Van Lankveld, 2011).

Teachers and Summer School

Teacher quality in summer school is an issue that has been examined by school districts in recent years. In the past many districts used seniority as the basis for offering summer school teaching positions. More recently these same districts are placing a greater emphasis on the quality of summer school, including teacher quality. In Houston preference to teach summer school is given to those with the greatest value added score. In Broward County, Florida those

applicants who have received a less than satisfactory evaluation are not considered. Experts in summer learning suggested that whatever criteria are used to recruit summer teachers, a special emphasis needs to be placed on teacher effectiveness (Sawchuk, 2011).

Another way to maximize teacher effectiveness is to offer adequate planning time and early exposure to curriculum and materials for the summer programs (Cooper & Educational Resources Information Center, 2001). The Summer Advantage program takes great care in who it selects for its teaching staff and it offers a minimum of 36 hours of paid planning time for teachers and teaching assistants (Shatzkin, 2011). McCombs et al. (2011) found that summer school teachers who were given an entire school year to plan for summer school with other high quality teachers were able to maximize summer school success.

Effectiveness of Summer School

Some of the earliest reviews of summer school from the 1970s and 1980s offered that summer school only produced modest change in students (Ascher, 1988; Heyns, 1978). However, more recent research on summer school offered a different view. Cooper et al. (2000) discovered that the average summer school student outperformed 60% of students who did not attend summer school. For elementary students, a focus on reading and math offered the greatest results. For disadvantaged students, a specific focus on reading helped to narrow the achievement gap. Additionally, it was suggested that summer programs must move from reactionary to providing a preventative and proactive program before students fall behind (Borman, 2001).

Cooper et al. (2000) used a meta-analysis to draw five conclusions regarding maximizing summer school. One conclusion was programs that focus less on removing deficiencies have more impact on the knowledge and skills of the participants. Another conclusion from the study

was that programs used to accelerate participants have as great an impact as those used to remediate. The third conclusion was that summer programs have a greater effect on achievement of middle class students than disadvantaged students. Additionally, it was found that summer remedial programs have the greatest effect when they offer small class sizes. Finally, it was found that summer schools that offer small group or individual instruction produce the largest impact on student learning (Cooper et al.).

Summary

Chapter 2 provided a review of the literature including topics beginning with the history of summer school. Additionally, I covered summer learning loss and an overview of different types of summer schools.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD

School districts across the nation are looking for extra time to increase student achievement. Therefore many districts are looking at the summer break as additional time to work with students. The focus of this study was to determine the attitude of summer school teachers regarding whether they are making a difference in the educational outcome of the students who attend. There is a specific focus on their most effective teaching strategies and other strategies that could be implemented in order to make summer school more effective for student learning. Using time outside of the regular school year to enrich and remediate students is an additional tool that school districts can use to help students succeed. Although results from this study are only relevant to this particular study, the results could help school districts analyze crucial areas for improvement as discerned by those teachers who have invested much in their students' summer learning.

This study used a qualitative design to determine the perceptions of summer school teachers about their ability to influence a student's long-term educational outcome. The components of creating and implementing a successful summer school were also examined in this study. This is a phenomenological study based on summer school teachers' perceptions about the process of teaching summer school students. McMillam and Schumaker (2010) suggested that a phenomenological study includes, "multiple ways of interpreting the same experience and that the meaning of the experience for each participant is what constitutes reality" (p. 346). Creswell (2003) suggested that a phenomenological study "identifies the 'essence' of human experience." (p. 15). Through the interview process, this methodology enables

researchers to discern the opinions and thought patterns from teacher participants regarding summer school effectiveness.

Focus of Study

The focus of this study was on the perceptions of summer school teachers regarding the process of teaching summer school students. This study developed through guided interviews with 10 summer school teachers. The result of this study was an exploration of what it meant to teach summer school students, what were the best practices used in the summer school, and how teaching summer school influenced teachers views. Furthermore, teachers were asked to reflect on what could make summer school more successful in the future. After interviews were transcribed, each was emailed to the participant in order to accomplish member checking. After approval by the participant, each interview was coded and themes extracted.

Research Questions

Four research questions guided this study:

1. How do you know the teaching strategies implemented during summer school were effective and how did you evaluate the teaching strategies?
2. Which organizational strategies implemented while teaching summer school were the most effective?
3. What changes could school districts make in order to make summer school more effective?
4. How did your participation, as a teacher in summer school, make a long term difference in students' educational outcome?

Selection of Participants

The population for this study was pre-Kindergarten through third grade summer school teachers from a school system in northeast Tennessee. The school system is both suburban and rural and is comprised of 16 schools serving pre-K through grade 12 with 9,055 students and 580 teachers. Approval to contact teachers within this school system was gained from the appropriate personnel (see Appendix A). For the purpose of this study, I used both purposeful and network sampling to select the interview participants. After establishing the initial email contact with summer school teachers, those interested in participating responded to the invitation and those participants provided contact information for other potential participants. Therefore, in addition to a purposeful sample, I used network sampling to find additional participants. I interviewed 10 summer school teachers. The participating school system had a diverse group of summer school teachers from those who teach special needs to those who teach enrichment courses, thus offering a variety of perspectives. There is, however, no ability to generalize the results from this study.

Instrument and Measurement

This research study is a phenomenological study that was used to uncover the meaning of summer school teachers' experiences. Methods of inquiry included interviews with 10 summer school teachers. According to Glesne (2011), "Qualitative researchers have an active role in producing the data they record through the questions they ask and the social interactions in which they take part" (p. 47). Semistructured interviews using an interview guide to ensure that the interviewer obtains similar information from each participant should keep the interactions focused (Hoepfl, 1997). The instrument used in this study was the in-depth interview. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described the in depth interview as, "Use open-response questions to

obtain data on participants' meaning" (p. 355). Interview guides that were reviewed by peers and colleagues were developed prior to the interviews and used for each conversation with the participants. As defined in McMillan and Schumacher (2010) an interview guide is used to suggest, "Topics are outlined in advance. The researcher decides the sequence and wording during the interview" (p. 356). An interview guide is used to create an environment for a semistructured interview format (see Appendix C) Additionally, the intention of interviewing is not only to shed light on the topic being studied but also to produce alternative accounts and varied ways of thinking about the topic (Polkinghorne, 2005). The interview questions are listed in Appendix C.

During each interview, I added follow-up questions and went into greater depth with questions based on participants' responses. The interviews were audio recorded and accurately transcribed. Each participant's responses were coded. With any data, interpretation of those data is necessary to pull out meaning and understanding. Taylor-Powell, Renner, and the University of Wisconsin – Cooperative Extension Service (2003) suggested that the first step in data analysis is for the researcher to become familiar with the data. The method I used to analyze the interviews was open-coding as suggested by O'Donoghue (2007). Open coding is, "A process whereby concepts, drawn from data are identified and developed in terms of their properties and dimensions" (O'Donoghue, 2007, p. 91). When examining interview transcripts, I pulled out the key concepts and made connections. O'Donoghue (2007) also points out that an expert researcher will do two things with the data; the first is, "Ask questions of the emerging categories of data" (p. 92) and the other is for the researcher to, "Make comparisons between the data concepts and categories" (p. 92). Additionally, I used my code notes to cross analyze and locate phenomenon and emerging concepts.

Validity and Reliability of the Research Design

Reliability and validity are necessary components of any research study. Validity is defined in McMillan and Schumacher (2010) as, “The degree of congruence between the explanation of the phenomena and the realities of the world” (p. 330). O’Donoghue (2007) suggested the following to help with validity and reliability:

The development of an ‘audit trail’ has become an accepted strategy for demonstrating the stability and trackability of data and the development of theory in qualitative studies. The permanent ‘audit trail’ created in this study allows one, if required, to ‘walk the readers through’ the work from the beginning to the end so that they can understand the path taken and the trustworthiness of the outcomes. (p. 100)

Reliability in qualitative research can be increased by keeping intricate notes and using high quality recordings. As the audio is transcribed details, such as the pauses in communication are essential to transcribe and often provide important information (Creswell 2007). Transparency with the work done in the research allows readers to understand the process a researcher has used to obtain the conclusions (Golafshani, 2003, p. 599). Therefore, participants were given the opportunity to review their transcribed interview with a process known as participant review (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In addition to transparency I recorded the interviews to increase the level of validity of this study. I also used member checking as a validity measure. Member checking allows the participants to confirm the meaning of their responses (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Creswell (2003) recommended that to present more accurate findings the researcher must present, “negative or discrepant information that runs counter to the themes. Because real life is composed of different perspectives that do not always coalesce, discussing contrary information adds to the credibility of an account for the reader” (p. 196). Additionally, Glesne (2011) offered a suggestion that to increase validity the researcher must reflect upon his or her own bias in order to monitor how it might present itself throughout the research project. Attending to issues of bias helps increase the trustworthiness of the study. Peer reviews were also

used to increase research validity. Peer reviews provide an “external check of the research process” (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). By using a peer reviewer and conducting “peer debriefing sessions” the researcher is open to listening to the peer reviewer give alternative perspectives based on the research (Creswell 2007).

Ethical Protocol

I used the Informed Consent Form found in Appendix D to gain approval for each participant’s involvement in the study. Approval to conduct this study was gained from the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix E). After initial contact was made with participants, a schedule was developed for interviews using the interview guide in Appendix C. Informed consent forms included the purpose of the study, how information would be collected, and a summary of the findings. Informed consent for the study was obtained emphasizing that participation was voluntary and that if there were any aspects of the study that may affect well being the participant could withdraw from the study at any time. Glesne (2011) proposed that informed consent can lead to empowering the research participants and creating a symmetrical relationship between the researcher and participant.

Each interview was recorded and transcribed. Anonymity of the participants was protected by having them pick an alias to use for the research. Participants were emailed their interview transcript to facilitate the review of their session. After the participants reviewed their session they were asked to respond with any changes or their approval. Following the transcription and approval, the interviews were coded to establish common themes and patterns of the interview responses.

Bias

When studying my own organization, it can be assumed that I have background knowledge and information that an outside person would not possess that could lead to bias. Therefore, it is noted that personal bias exists because I am employed by the same school system as the participating teachers. Additionally as suggested by Glense (2011), when a researcher is conducting a study where they work those around the researcher may “experience confusion at times over which role you are or should be playing” (p. 41). As suggested by Creswell (2003), reporting data that are compromised or biased is difficult to overcome under these circumstances. Geographical bias is also acknowledged because all of the participants are from the same school system and live in the same general geographic location. Gender bias was a factor as there were only female participants.

Data Collection

Data collected in this study included an in-depth interview with 10 participants. A location for each interview was selected by the participants at a time that was convenient for her. Each participant signed an informed consent form (see Appendix D). Each interview was audio recorded and notes were taken related to the interview that helped with follow-up questions and notes on observations throughout the interview. The interviews followed a semistructured format. An interview guide was used to guarantee the collection of specific information while leaving flexibility to have the participant expand on any unexpected answers and expand on answers or additional questions that may arise. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Data Analysis

O'Donoghue (2007) described data analysis in qualitative research as an ongoing process. The first stage of the data analysis is gathering all the data in the form of interview transcripts. Then open-coding of the interview transcripts begins with the goal of developing key ideas, themes, and concepts. Glesne (2011) described thematic analysis as when the researcher “focuses analytical techniques on searching through the data for themes and patterns” (p. 187). The researcher must figure out what is at the core of the code by using thematic analysis when examining the coding. Sifting through the interview transcripts and developing a list of significant statements adds to the development of themes. Treating each statement with equal worth and developing more thematic theory from the statements adds to the research (Creswell 2007). I searched for themes and patterns to build understanding of the information collected during the interview.

The cross-interview analysis is conducted to make comparisons to those ideas that have already emerged through other interviews (O'Donoghue 2007). Bogdan and Biklen (1992) described data analysis for qualitative research as a process of systematically sifting through interview transcripts, field notes, documents, and other materials gathered, in order to increase the researcher's understanding and enable the researcher to present discoveries.

Summary

The research methodology used with this phenomenological study was qualitative in design and focused on summer school teachers. Participants were determined by using both purposeful and network sampling. Methods of inquiry include interviews with 10 summer school teachers. Member checking, participant review, transparency, and presentation of both common themes and outlier ideas are presented to increase validity and reliability. Interviews were

analyzed and coded to ascertain themes. Analysis of interviews explains the phenomenon of summer school teachers' experiences and perceived influence on students. Themes were then extracted and presented in chapters 4 and 5.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The findings of this qualitative study were developed through in-depth interviews with summer school teachers. This phenomenological study was based on summer school teachers' perceptions about the process of teaching summer school and their ability to influence a student's long-term educational outcome. Additionally, perceptions of the participants about the components of creating and implementing a successful summer school program were examined in this study. The goals of phenomenological research are to identify "the essence of human experience concerning a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2003).

My purpose was to explore the phenomena of summer school teachers' perception of the summer school process by interviewing 10 public school teachers who had taught during summer school. The participating teachers taught pre-Kindergarten through third grade in a summer school setting.

Ethical issues with this study were carefully considered and examined. Additionally, human subject research approval was granted from the East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix E). The 10 participants were briefed about the study and signed informed consent forms. Confidentiality was maintained and the names of the participants were not included in the results. Participants were allowed to pick the time and place of their interview. Responses obtained from the interview questions were transcribed and arranged so that each participant's responses could be evaluated and themes extracted. Interviews lasted approximately 1 to 2 hours.

Participant Information

Each participating teacher was selected based on having taught summer school for pre-Kindergarten through third grade. The interviews were conducted at their convenience. Each participant's information is organized in the following section.

Participant 1 chose Jody as her alias. Jody has 17 years of teaching experience with 12 years of summer school experience. She has an Ed.S. in curriculum and instruction. The researcher knew Jody and had an established relationship prior to the interview, which resulted in a comfortable interview process. The interview took place in Jody's classroom.

Participant 2 chose Emily as her alias. Emily has approximately 20 years of experience with a master's degree. She has taught summer school for 13 years. However, she does not currently work as a classroom teacher. The interview took place in the office at her school. The researcher has an established relationship with Emily and she readily answered each question with careful thought and attention to detail.

Participant 3 chose Sarah as her alias. Sarah has 16 years teaching experience with 7 years as a summer school teacher. She has a master's degree with 30 additional graduate hours. The interview was conducted in her classroom after school. The researcher had worked with Sarah for 1 year approximately 10 years before the interview, so there was an established relationship. She seemed to be comfortable and open during the interview process.

Participant 4 chose Beth as her alias. Beth has 7 years teaching experience but is no longer a classroom teacher. She has 9 years of educational experience with a master's degree. She has taught summer school for 3 years. Beth and the researcher have an established relationship. The interview was conducted in her office and was relaxed. Beth was keenly aware

of her experience as a summer school teacher and able to share her deep knowledge of pedagogy throughout the interview.

Participant 5 chose Susan as her alias. Susan has 23 years experience in education and 5 years experience as a summer school teacher. She has a master's degree with 20 additional graduate hours. The interview took place in her office and her creative enthusiasm for teaching was apparent during the interview.

Participant 6 chose Brandy as her alias. Brandy has 20 years teaching experience and has taught summer school 3 years. She has a master's degree. Having a previously established relationship with Brandy, the interview was comfortable. Brandy expressed a sincere passion for education as well as a deep commitment to educating the whole student. The interview took place in her classroom.

Participant 7 chose Jennifer as her alias. Jennifer has 20 years teaching experience and has taught summer school for 12 years. Her highest level of education is an Ed.S. The interview was conducted in her office. Jennifer and the researcher have an established relationship; she has a deep knowledge for teaching, which was revealed in her interview.

Participant 8 chose Becky as her alias. Becky has 2 years of teaching experience and has taught summer school for 1 year. She has a bachelor's degree. Becky and the researcher have no previous relationship, but she seemed very comfortable and willing to share. The interview took place in her classroom.

Participant 9 chose Janice as her alias. Janice has 11 years teaching experience and has taught summer school for 4 years. Her highest level of education is a master's degree. The researcher and Janice have an established relationship. The interview took place in her office and

throughout the interview she was able to express her enthusiasm and willingness to go above expectations with her students.

Participant 10 chose Holly as her alias. Holly has 8 years teaching experience with 6 years as a summer school teacher. Her highest level of education is a master's degree. Holly and the researcher have no previous relationship, but she seemed to be comfortable and willing to share throughout the interview, which took place in her classroom.

Findings for the Research Questions

Two introductory questions were used to begin the participant interviews:

1. What was your motivation for teaching summer school?
2. How did teaching summer school make a difference in your teaching career?

Four research questions provided the focus for this study:

1. How do you know the teaching strategies implemented during summer school were effective and how did you evaluate your teaching strategies?
2. Which organizational strategies implemented while teaching summer school were the most effective?
3. What changes could school districts make in order to make summer school more effective?
4. How did your participation, as a teacher in summer school, make a long-term difference in students' educational outcome?

Introductory Questions

Two introductory questions were used to encourage the teacher participants to think about the reason they participated in teaching summer school and how they viewed it as a part of their teaching careers.

Introductory Question 1: What was your motivation for teaching summer school?

The results are summarized in Table 1 with some of the comments also noted here. Jody answered, “lots of times it was the money.” Susan offered, “probably the money and extra income.” Brandy said, “The money was nice. There is a good stipend for it.” Emily answered with the following:

The extra income was a really good motivation, but it is also fun. I get to interact with the kids in a different way that I would normally in the regular school year and it kind of takes away from that want to go back to the regular classroom, cause I get that little bit in time because I get to be the teacher in charge in that class so and with the younger children you are helping them with reading and skills that are so basic to their success that I feel like that is a motivator too. It’s a lot of fun you get to do not only the educational but we get the opportunity to do enrichment activities too that you don’t always have time for in the regular day.

Table 1
Motivation for Teaching Summer School

	Money	Routine	Seeing academic or social growth	Relaxed teaching environment
Jody	X			
Emily		X		
Sarah	X			X
Beth			X	X
Susan	X			
Brandy	X			
Jennifer	X		X	
Becky	X	X		
Janice			X	
Holly	X	X	X	X

Sarah also offered that the money was nice but she liked the “relaxed setting and flexibility.” Beth reflected on her motivation for teaching summer school as she was called and asked to teach her first year because they needed more teachers because of extra students. She added that after the first year she was *addicted* to teaching during the summer. Jennifer suggested that in addition to the money her motivation was because she “sees the need for students to maintain over the summer.” Becky suggested that she liked the consistency of not having a break because she would get *bored* if she was not teaching. Janice offered that she liked teaching summer school because she could teach a different grade than during the regular school year. As a pre-Kindergarten teacher in summer school, Janice suggested that she recognized the importance of “building the students up to get them ready for kindergarten.” Holly offered the following when asked what her motivation was for teaching summer school:

I like the break... we get kindergarten kids so far in the year. I teach Pre K kids and gets me in the mindset of this kid can't hold a pencil this kid can't write his name. They can't even talk to me they can't sit at the carpet. I do it to get back in the mindset of august before august gets here and everything else is going on and it's crazy with all your kids and you get back into it with a smaller group of kids.

Introductory Question 2: How did teaching summer school make a difference in your teaching career?

When asked introductory question 2 about how teaching summer school made a difference in the teacher participants' teaching careers, the researcher received varied responses. Jody and Sarah both suggested that summer school was beneficial to their career because often they would have the students again during the regular school year. Jody offered that, “A lot of times I was going to have those students the following year, then it gave me a head's up on knowing what we needed to concentrate on for that particular student.” Sarah said that when she would have the students in both summer school and the regular school year she would already

know what areas to concentrate on for each child. Sarah expressed how nice it was to already have an established relationship with the parents and students following summer school, “When teaching pre kindergarten in summer school I always knew I was going to have those students again in Kindergarten or first grade and I was always extremely close to those students.” Emily suggested that teaching summer school was good for her because she is not a traditional classroom teacher anymore and she was able to “enjoy the time with students in a different setting.” Beth expressed that summer school was a time when she could implement new teaching strategies:

I really felt like in the summers I could experiment a little bit. For example, if I wanted to try a cooking project that connects science and math and have them write about it I could try that out in the summer because I typically had smaller classes in the summer and I could see if it was something I could use during the regular school year. I really feel like summer school is a bit more relaxed so there is not quite as much pressure that teacher feel during the regular school year. So for me it helped me feel the joy of teaching without as much pressure.

Susan suggested that teaching summer school provides opportunities for teachers to quickly analyze where students are academically and move them forward. In her career, having to work under this type of pressure provided additional skills for her to use in the classroom during the regular school year saying she was able to *read* her students better. Brandy had a more challenging school year going into summer school this past school year and she expressed that summer school provided her with a smaller group of students who were willing to “try new things.”

Several of the participants reflected on their teaching career saying that summer school helped them gain a greater understanding of other grade levels. Jennifer offered that during the school year she taught older students and during summer school she worked with pre-Kindergarten students. Jennifer offered the following regarding how summer school made a difference in her teaching career:

It certainly did when I first started because I taught fourth grade and I was teaching 10-year-olds year after year after year. I went right into teaching 5- and 6-year-olds. I was able to see what they were coming into the school with. Seeing how low some of the students were. It lets you see how they grow to fourth grade. Lets you know about parent involvement at that age the difference. Knowing that you love them all no matter what age they are but it's just a different level and maturity with different behaviors.

Becky said that teaching first grade in summer school helped her to realize that she can push her students to work more independently. Janice said teaching pre-Kindergarten in summer school reminds her of where the students "come from." Holly suggested that she easily forgets how little her students know at the beginning of the school year because they develop so many skills over the year. Teaching summer school reminds Holly of where the students start out.

It helps me at the beginning of the year because I am already back to that mind set because we have them reading writing because they are doing phenomenal by the end of kindergarten compared to Pre K and it changed my teaching because it gets them ready for the next year without the shock. The years that I have not taught it it's like OMG they can't hold their pencil or use glue they can't they can't they can't and in summer school you have already done that with a small group. It's not the shock that it is if you don't teach summer school. You adapt your teaching differently like I said I am already looking forward to summer school next year. They want them to know them to know the alphabet letters and sounds and reading and writing by January now so in summer school it has changed my teaching because I am going to work on letters and letter sounds in summer school to prepare them for the year and give them the head start and extra jump.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 was: How do you know the teaching strategies implemented during summer school were effective and how did you evaluate your teaching strategies? Two interview questions were used to gain greater insight into research question 1.

Interview Question 1-1: What evidence do you have that your teaching strategies were effective?

For interview question 1-1 all of the participants mentioned using a pretest and posttest with the students to assess educational growth during summer school. Jody offered that in addition to pre- and posttesting she could see if her teaching strategies were effective by "simple

observation of the students.” Becky offered that the posttest results of “seeing that they did score better the second time than the first.” Janice said that all of her student’s Brigance score “improved by the end of summer school.” Emily expounded on interview question 1-1 by sharing the following:

We’ll do a pretest in language arts and we will do a pretest in math and you can pretty much gauge from students that are more successful than other students and it will allow you to see the areas of need and because the classes are smaller they try not to have more than 10 or 15 students. You can really work with individual students in the areas where you know they need work. You have got a test right there that shows you and teachers work together. Teacher Z and I have taught summer school together and worked together and developed what we feel are effective pre and post tests. You are getting the information about where there is a need. Then at the end we administer a posttest and you can see in that span of 20 days or whatever how they’ve grown.

Jennifer added that there is always an improvement in scores for those students who “attend regularly.” Holly shared how she sees the changes in the school year curriculum influencing what she teaches during summer school with the following:

We give the Brigance in the spring and that is our base score and then they take it again at the end of summer school. Which I don’t like the Brigance test because I think it’s a joke. That’s a nerve. But your goal is to do that but my big goal is to get them to write their name where they can recognize it. It might not be perfect but when you have a large class twenty plus kids if they can’t write their name then they are all the way behind. All ready with the common core being implemented I am already looking forward to next year because we have to start reading and writing so much earlier now I am already going OK typically we touch on the alphabet but we are going to be doing a letter a day in summer school to expose them to the letters because typically it’s the routines. It’s the listening to the stories following directions but with kindergarten curriculum changing with common core now we have to get those letters and sounds into them in summer school they will at least be familiar with hearing them.

Beth shared that she could see a difference with her kids throughout summer school.

Part of the reason I chose to teach Pre K is that you can see the growth during those nineteen days. When they first come several of them are crying and clinging to whoever dropped them off and by the end of summer they are waving at the door. They also learn how to do things like walk in a line, use the restroom, and sit through a story. In Pre-K we focus on writing our names so I keep the beginning of summer school names and look at it again at the end of summer school and typically you can see a big difference.

Sarah suggested the work she did and her evaluation was all “data driven.” Susan said in addition to pretesting and posttesting, she also used “bar graphs to track student growth.”

Brandy, in addition to the pretest and post testing, also suggested that she used the most successful strategies from the regular school year with her summer school students, “I did a lot of the same stuff I would do in my regular classroom.”

Interview Question 1-2: How did you evaluate your teaching strategies?

Jody shared the following:

Part of the reason I chose to teach pre-K is that you can see the growth because the growth you can see during those nineteen days socially and academically. When they first come in that first day several of them are crying and clinging to whoever dropped them off and by the end of summer school they are waiving at the door. The students typically don't know how to sit down and eat a meal and needing a lot of help to make it through a meal and where summer school we give them a light breakfast and light lunch by the end of summer school they are prepared to sit down in the cafeteria and eat like they are going to do it during school. They also learn how to do things like walk in line, use the restroom, one squirt of soap a little paper towel. That sort of thing. Then in the classroom environment they learn to sit through a story. That first day of school I always sit down to read a story but I never make it through before someone is rolling around, crying, or wanting to leave. Then by the end of summer school they are able to sit down through an entire read aloud. In pre-K we focus on writing our names so I keep the beginning of summer school names and then look at it again at the end of summer school and typically you can see a big difference in those two.

Emily shared more about evaluating her teaching strategies:

I think a lot of is bouncing things off your co teachers. We share ideas and what works and you can gear each year's a little different because you do have to gear to the students and their abilities when they come in. Sometimes I think it is mistaken that all of the kids are struggling when they come and they are not. Some of them are very advanced and you have to kind of tweak that too and you don't want them to be bored when they are there. So that is where the enrichment comes in.

Becky offered this about evaluating her teaching throughout the day during summer school:

I guess just you know day to day how they did and if they weren't getting it I would stop right there and re teach or the next day I would alter my instruction. I found that out a lot

because stuff that I expected them to know they had no clue. I am not sure if they lost it over the small break or maybe they did not have it.

Sarah added that she focused on reading during summer school and that she could, “just tell they were getting a little better.” While Holly offered, “You can see if the kids are getting it.” Similarly, Janice said that she evaluated her strategies by, “seeing how the kids were doing.” Beth said she evaluated her teaching strategies by, “looking for progression.” Susan said she used weekly test scores to evaluate her teaching strategies.

Both Brandy and Jennifer said they used formative assessments to evaluate their teaching strategies. Jennifer said, “I used formative assessment and day-to-day assessments of the children and their social skills and their academic skills.”

Research Question 2

Research question 2 was: Which organizational strategies implemented while teaching summer school were the most effective? Two interview questions were used to gain greater understanding into research question 2.

Interview Question 2-1: What preparation did you receive for teaching summer school?

Participants made similar comments when asked to describe the preparation program, Jennifer offered, “There is a workshop beforehand, then you have hours of in-service time you can use so that you can get your plans and materials together and contact parents of summer school students.” Emily responded with, “They have an organizational meeting for everyone. Then we are given specific planning hours to plan as a summer school staff.” Susan said, “An initial meeting at Central Office, very short, and then after that meeting the actual teachers for summer school get together and meet at individual school sites.” Jody went into detail adding:

We would meet together as a group at the site and get organized. For me personally, I would take a couple of days to get organized and make sure I had everything I needed. If

I was going to a different school, I would have to pack everything up. I would focus on particular themes.

Greater detail about the preparation received by summer school teachers was explained

by Emily:

They have an overall meeting for everyone; an organizational meeting is what they call it. We are given so many planning hours that are expected as a part of that contract and that includes planning as a staff, we will select a theme, and everyone decides what they are teaching, and if we are doing it sort of departmentalized by subjects that will be discussed. The system itself directs it be a lot of enrichment activities and you're given that explanation in that organizational meeting. Things like the pretest we give, because there are pretests and posttests that we give, those things are directed by the school system as expectations.

Sarah and Becky both suggested that they might have appreciated more preparation and organization. Beth said that at the district meeting she was given sample "introduction letters to give to families." Brandy offered that after the initial district wide summer school meeting each school site would meet to develop a *theme*. Janice said that they also discussed an "end of summer school celebration." Holly suggested that, "If you are lucky enough to have a teacher teaching the same grade level with you then you can collaborate with them but mostly it's on your own."

Interview Question 2-2: Did the preparation program help to prepare you for teaching summer school?

Jody and Brandy offered that the preparation program was helpful. Emily shared that some years the preparation has more helpful than others, depending on what grade level she was teaching and offering that with certain grade levels there is more collaboration specifically with pre-Kindergarten summer school. The participants often referred to summer school as being more relaxed than the regular school year. Emily said,

I think there is a lot of pressure on teachers these days and maybe it's that pressure is not there. There's not a TCAP test or whatever and I don't know that it is that it is very

different. It is a relaxed setting where there is still learning happening but you get to have a little more fun. You don't care to take 20 minutes and let them do some type of craft that connects to a story they have written and sometimes in the regular school year you just hate to do that because there are all these things you need to get covered by this certain date. So I think it is different.

Susan offered the following related to the helpfulness of the preparation program:

Yes definitely, especially the organizational meetings. I think we had three last year that I taught where all the teachers just at that school site were deciding who is going to teach what, how the schedule is going to go...if we hadn't had those I mean it would have been chaos the first few days.

An organizational practice that the teachers appreciated was when they were able to teach summer school in their own classroom. Brandy shared:

I think I would try to let the teachers work in their own classroom. What I mean is I had to move down to another classroom in a fourth grade room. The materials that I needed I had to come down to my classroom where they were trying to clean, etc. I had to load up as much stuff as I could and of course I couldn't take everything I needed.

Brandy reflected on the advantage of a small class size by saying:

It takes 180 days with 20 kids. I think if it's a small enough group and the teacher has a small enough group and a positive attitude and activities are well planned I think you can make a difference.

Jennifer said the following regarding the helpfulness of the preparation program:

It certainly helped in the beginning and the time helps me to get plans together. I think contacting the parents and let them ask any questions and reassure them who will have their child for a month of summer school is helpful.

Becky said that the preparation program did not help with her *instruction*. Janice said that the preparation program was not helpful to her. Sarah said the most recent summer school preparation was not helpful to her but in years past it had been helpful. Beth offered that the preparation was essential to creating a *good summer school*. Holly shared the following related to the relaxed nature of summer school:

In summer school you are able to play more and it's not you have to get them ready for this test and yes they need to improve the Brigance and write their name but you can have more fun with them. We can take our time we can do the crafty thing. I am not big on

crafts during the school year. Because I can't justify crafts for what I am trying to teach if I find a craft that I can put with curriculum in summer school I am not so much worried about curriculum and I want them to know number one through five and to write their name and know colors then you are able to throw in the fun aspect. You want it to be fun for them because if summer school is fun kindergarten will be fun. Getting in the mindset of school and the kids excited about school.

An organizational practice that was shared in the interview by Holly was the benefit of a small class size,

Summer school is different because typically you have a smaller class size which helps tremendously because if you have your kids who have never been to school whose parents haven't worked with them who need that one on one and it's just different because of the smaller class size.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 was: What changes could school districts make in order to make summer school more effective? One interview question was used to gain greater understanding into the research question.

Interview Question 3-1: If you were designing a summer school program to maximize student learning, what would that look like?

Jody suggested that the teachers should teach a grade level that they are used to teaching.

It would have the same level teachers teaching what their passion is. It would be your kindergartner and 1st grade teachers teaching kindergarten and 1st grade.... My ideal situation would be that you would have enough students that you could still have your individual grades. The problem is too many times you don't have enough students. You are always working with numbers and crunching numbers and you end up with a class mixed. First, 2nd, and maybe 3rd grade combined. One teacher is probably from the 5th grade moving down. Ideally, you would want each level and a certified teacher who is passionate about that grade or at least has significant knowledge about that grade.

Emily offered a reflection on how she would maximize student learning with the following:

I know it would last longer and I know I don't want to say that because I enjoy the 20 days and that allows me a breather, too, for when I come back in August but I do think it

might last longer. I do think it might involve enrichment trips on a weekly basis. I think it would involve a little more planning with the staff, collaboration, coordination where that theme, you can link that theme to the instruction and I don't want to describe it like a summer camp. That is not what I am talking about. I think hours of instruction are maybe 80 hours, maybe not that many. It's hard to plan a really effective program in that short amount of time. And I don't think it is easy to plan because generally you find out you are teaching summer school in May and it starts in June and for someone who is a little OCD I like to kind of have my ducks in a row and sometimes you wing it the first few days and I would rather not wing it.

You don't always know how many are going to show up in a grade level and you have to move people around, but if we had a general idea of what we want to do a little better than we do... I think it would be more effective because I do think we wing it the first couple of days. And I know generally our planning is dividing up tasks but they'll have PE here, and then your numbers play a big role in how that might change and so I guess maybe more concrete information. They cannot contact anyone and then drop them off the first day of summer school that's fantastic because that gives us more participants.

I have never been in a school that hasn't had 100 kids for summer school. Of course that makes planning harder. I guess a little more time would help but I do think trips because those are great experiences. Those are things we all take for granted and I think there are kids that come to summer school that would not experience some of those things if we didn't have it there but right now we don't. I worked in the preschool program where once a month they went on an enrichment trip and these were coming from families who didn't have any wants or needs and it became intriguing to think of places to take them because they had all been everywhere. But to see a kid who has never eaten at a Japanese restaurant and never been in the mall. Those are eye opening experiences so I think those things would benefit their learning as much as one on one instruction in the classroom. So I think that would be an effective summer school program but I do think longer.

Sarah suggested that more time for enrichment would add to student learning with the following statement:

I would like to see them have more time with trained people in the arts, as far as enrichment, like a real music teacher, real art teacher...and some of the schools actually have that. I think that would be most ideal and we used to be able to take field trips and I understand that money is not there but having the field trips back.

Beth made the following suggestions:

I like the time frame where we do summer school in our district because it's not too long of a day and we offer breakfast and lunch which I think is very important to our students that we serve. Because a lot of them do not have access to nutritious meals through the day in the summertime. What we feed them at school is what some of them get. So I would defiantly keep the breakfast and the lunch. I think it's very important. We also do some sort of family involvement activity where we pull the families in and show them what we have been doing and give them advice of what they can do at home if I could

design my own program. I think a little bit more collaboration and team teaching style. I would promote that more. Because my strengths are more in language arts and I could rely on someone else who has more of a math background and we could pair up and work better together that way. I like the small class sizes. The first year I taught I had a multi age group of 20 plus students. We managed and I know they learned but I don't feel like I was as effective as the years that I had 15 kids. Small classes can really help. Then just making teachers aware that summer school is not all about remediation it is about pushing forward.

Susan offered the following recommendation:

I think technology tie-in would have to be there now for the kids we are serving now with the iPod or iPads and different things they have to access both video and audio. They love to learn that way. We had some use of computers but limited in summer school. You have to be careful because you are in other people's rooms and the teacher is not there so I think definitely more technology. I would want to keep the fun activity going. Something they are working for at the end of the week. We do that here in traditional school but its bigger things at certainly father increments apart but I think something every week to motivate and just make it fun! Guest speakers have been effective in getting people in to motivate the students. We did that one year with an Olympian, Fain Grogg. We had him come in at School X the year we did the Olympian theme. He is a paraplegic and he competes on a national level in the Olympics. He had even been on the Cheerios box and when he came in to meet with our kids, they went bananas. He was very motivating for the kids. Things like that, those connections get them really motivated to learn.

Brandy commented if the teachers could teach in their own classroom they would have access to their materials, which in turn would aid in student learning. Several participants commented regarding class size and additional ideas to improve student learning. Jennifer made the following comment regarding how to maximize student learning:

The one thing that I would change but I understand why it is what it is but I would reduce the class size. I understand it's federal funding but I would also love to see more arts within the summer school program. We certainly need to be stressing math and language arts but it's a good opportunity to have the arts. Just like in the regular school day it's the effectiveness of the teacher. There is no need to go into summer school teaching if you are only doing it for the paycheck.

Becky suggested, "Making it different than the school year by having a theme instead of just here is a worksheet this is what we are going to do today; hands on stuff, arts, crafts, and

snacks.” Janice suggested that there is not much she would alter to maximize student learning with pre-Kindergarten students. However,

For the other grades I would encourage a pre program for the next year not remediation. So when they walk into their classroom they are with their peers and not already behind. I think it could be a longer time frame. I am a big proponent of year round school.

Holly offered the following:

Definitely have small class size smaller because you can do a lot more with them. Offering more fun aspects to summer school that you don’t have during the regular school year. Also, you can do science activities and social studies activities that you might not get to in the regular year because you have so many kids.

Research Question 4

Research question 4 was: How did your participation, as a teacher in summer school, make a long term difference in students’ educational outcome? Four interview questions aided the researcher in gaining a greater understanding of research question 4.

Interview Question 4-1: How did you make a difference with the students? Would you share a particular example?

Jody suggested that making a difference with students is, “letting them have a fond experience in summer school. Summer school is more laid back. We try to do more fun activities. For some of them it was they were excited about summer school and just getting to come.” Emily shared the following:

Some of those children would not have positive interaction anywhere except for school so I think that does make a difference. In the past I think there were probably students who got to experience things on their field trips and those enrichment activities that they may not have gotten to experience otherwise. So you are not only reaching those kids with really involved parents, but some of the ones who maybe has a parent that is not involved and so having an active adult participating with them for a good portion of that day is good. And for some of those kids it is meals. Because they are getting breakfast and lunch and for those days they are getting good food. I think those things make a difference.

A student in my summer school class last year who is now in my class this school year was a struggling reader when I first got her and I am not going to say that 20 days made a tremendous difference, I am going to say I have got to watch her progress and now I don't identify her as a struggling reader. She is a strong reader. And I think it helped, I think it helped that was a time she was not one of 20 or 25 and she got some additional help and I think it made a difference. She struggled in math and I can honestly stand back and watch her work independently and it is not a struggle and I know it didn't hurt for her to be in a small setting like that for 20 days and you know get that extra help and I can see the advances in her ability.

Sarah shared a story about a student she had in summer school and again during the following traditional school year.

This child is actually in my class this year. I was teaching the students that were going into first grade. His family is a little bit rougher situation. The mom is usually really, really not nice to people at school, and that is putting it nicely. So I had him in summer school and I was really nervous about having him but it's made a big difference and she is already used to me and I have already smoothed that out and she is not so angry at me now. She still is at the other people but not at me. Actually it made a difference for me more than anything and that has calmed him down a lot. Being with me in the summer has helped him and made it easier for him to come here. He is more trusting of me.

Beth reflected on seeing a difference the first day of the traditional school year with those summer school students saying that their teachers, "often comment that they can tell the student went to summer school." She shared the following story:

I had my little runner at the beginning of summer school he would take off out the door. So we put bells on the door and we really worked with him that summer and he stayed in the classroom. So when school started I was watchful to see if he would bolt and he did not. He was confident staying in the room and he did not feel the need to wonder around. I know one student cried for the first week of summer school and he only cried the first 2 days of kindergarten. I feel like him having those 19 days in the classroom helped him acclimate quicker to kindergarten.

Susan offered the following story:

I hope I made a difference! I had a fifth grader who I paired with an instructional assistant for an hour a day because his reading skills were very, very low. She did simple flash cards with him and we pre-tested him on those sight words at the first of the summer and he maybe only had 10 or 12. By the end of summer school he had increased it up to at least 30 words.

Brandy offered, “I saw improvement. I saw more improvement from the ones who came every day than those who skipped a day or came less frequently.” Regarding making a difference with students, Jennifer offered the following thoughts and subsequent story:

I think socially it was certainly helpful because some of the students do have behavior issues and to maintain behavior consistently through the school day and they don't come back after a wild summer of no rules or expectations. It gives them some coping skills on how they can self monitor and gets their behavior in check. Just academically some of the students did need remediation then you can bring them up a little and let their parents know how they can help them along so they might be better prepared with the school year starts to be one grade level. Then those students who were beyond grade level to challenge them to go on.

I had student this summer that had gone through the kindergarten year and they were planning on retaining him in kindergarten. A bright child but was discovered the last few months of school of his kindergarten school year that he was legally blind. So instead of allowing him to go back to kindergarten he came with me through summer school. He is very auditory and certainly knew how to do things. He received glasses the first week of summer school and was able to make miraculous progress. My request was that he not be retained in kindergarten that he moves on knowing that he might be retained in first grade. But he had all of the information he just wasn't able to see but he was so auditory and I would read a book and although he couldn't read because he couldn't see he could quote the book because he listened so much.

Becky added that she made a difference by building relationships with students and families, “When you see them (students) in the hall and they are like hi Ms. Becky and you also know their families, it can make a difference.” Janice offered during her interview that the biggest difference is often socialization and she shared the following story:

There was a student who came to me with behavior problems for instance he did not know how to go to the bathroom on his own. So with that student I worked on going to the bathroom. I had to talk with him about wiping himself.

Holly offered the following regarding making a difference with the students. “That is what makes you want to teach because you can see the growth in all the kids but the summer school kids you really can see the difference.” She offered the following story about a student:

I had one girl 2 years ago. She came into summer school and she knew her name but she did not know her alphabet or anything, which is not uncommon for pre-K, and we got her writing her name and she got a couple of letters in summer school. I wound up having her in class during the traditional school year. It was a great feeling when you know where

they start in their first educational experience and watching her grow in summer school and have her that year. By the end of the year she was reading any book she wanted to grab of the little readers.

Interview Question 4-2: How does attending a summer school program prepare a student for the next grade level?

Jody described summer school as a *bridge* from one grade to the next, “Yes we were working on remediation but a lot of times we were looking ahead.” Emily suggested that the best example of preparing students for the next grade level is the pre-Kindergarten program.

If separation is going to be an issue then being in that summer school program is going to give them some separation practice and it works because by the end of that summer school time you are not usually going to have kids crying when their parents drop them off. I think that is the best example of how it can make the transition much easier because they have already done it for the entire month and for a lot of kids it is in the building where they will be attending in August and it makes the transition go smoother.

Sarah added that summer school provides some routine and repetitiveness and that often parents do not have time to work with students at home. Beth suggested that pre-Kindergarten summer school gives the students an idea about what to expect during Kindergarten. Susan said that she prepared students for the next grade by using the standards from that grade level. Becky suggested the following:

It lets them know what to expect what is coming up next and things they can work on because I send home packets you know at the end of the week and even at the end of summer school. Here are some things to work and this is what to expect in the first grade.

Brandy explained how she viewed summer school as a means to prepare students for the next grade level.

I think it keeps them in a routine. I think they see that they will be adding to their skill set. Did you write in kindergarten? Well in 1st grade you are going to write more. In 2nd grade you are expected to do even more than that. When I would pair them up to read to one another we would talk about how they would be reading more books and more difficult books. I think being honest about expectations is important.

Jennifer added that part of preparing a student for the next grade level is:

Strengthening the home to school connection. I think it makes their parents aware as well and that is certainly helpful. So their parents know those upcoming standards. Know the expectation and realize that their kids do that summer slide if they don't keep reading to them and have them work on their skills.

Also referring to pre-Kindergarten students, Janice shared the following:

For those students who have never been worked with at home at all. Getting up in the morning and coming and having to sit down at breakfast and lunch. Helping them to learn how to open their milk carton. Teaching them the very basics. At the end my lowest child on the Brigance scored 80. The most I had was twenty students. I think that it also helped the parents. I hate to say this but most of my parents were very unaware and they probably had bad experiences with school themselves. We did a couple of programs where I would have the parents to come in and the kids would perform songs and let them know what they need to work at home. Something else I would always spend my money on glue, crayons, and scissors and give them activities to work on at home until school started.

Holly offered this:

Some of the kids come in who are only children who have only been with mom and don't really have friends for the kids to play with. In summer school you can do more play where kindergarten now is more focused on curriculum.

Interview Question 4-3: How did you inspire students to be successful in the next grade level?

Jody described inspiring her students.

Again, we would just try to make it more fun and if they wanted to be there and if they had something to look forward to. Having a little pizza party or movie day and because they had rewards, the rewards would give them success that would then roll over into I can do this, I can multiply, I can whatever.

Emily suggested that summer school is inspirational to students because, "It gives them a chance to succeed." Sarah suggested that she hoped her summer school students would enter the next school year feeling like "leaders" in their classroom. Beth said the "parental support" that is facilitated through summer school will help to inspire students to be successful in the next grade. Susan implied that by keeping the academic momentum going the students would have more inspiration to be successful.

The last year I taught we had the theme of the Olympics and try to make it fun and also motivating and we had rewards. So for that kid who school wasn't a good thing summer school was a little bit different. Several of the kids have commented "this is fun." We did foods from around the world during our activity time and that was kind of our overriding theme and how people come from all parts of the country and we had a tasting party every day and try a new food. We had money to do some kind of theme and that's how we tied it in. It was very motivating and they loved it.

Brandy suggests that a theme can be inspirational for students when she shared the following:

I was real impressed that we had a fun theme. We did a pirate theme. Everything I did working with another teacher, was around the pirate theme. All of our literature, writing, and math centered on that theme. We even dressed as pirates one day. The teachers and students dressed up. The whole front of the school was a giant pirate ship where the students entered each morning. Someone had it left over from a church's Bible School. The lead teacher went to a local sporting goods store and they let us borrow a kayak and the whole area looked like a pirate ship. I think that is what made it different than *normal* school. You have to make them want to be here. If it's just like school they are not going to like it. If they have to come in and print their ABC's or just do addition worksheets. I don't think you are going to make a difference. They are not going to like it or want to attend.

Jennifer suggested that summer school is a smaller, more intimate educational environment that provides more opportunities for inspiration. Becky said that she inspired her students by staying positive. Janice offered that she tries to inspire students by, "making it as fun as possible." Holly reflected on inspiring students by saying:

By making a big celebration when they are writing their name and different things when we share.... look what so and so did and they share theirs and we give rounds of applause and we clap for them and cheer for them you build that by getting the kids excited about their stuff and their show and talk about what they did good and it's amazing you see the other kids working harder on their picture because they are like I want to share.

Interview Question 4-4: How can summer school make a long-term difference in a student's educational experience?

Jody suggested that summer school can make a long term difference with the student if the teacher has, "the right personality." Sarah offered that summer school could make a

difference if the student has the “right attitude.” Emily shared an activity that happened during summer school that was so impactful it could make a long-term difference with the summer school students:

‘Cause I think you can make it a positive experience, and I see it more now than in the past there are a lot of kids that their first reaction to school is a negative one and maybe that comes from family and because summer school is a little bit different than the school year, they get to interact with us a little bit differently and that positive experience can change a little bit about how they feel about school. They can see there are fun things they can do in an educational setting. We do some parent involvement activities.

One of the things we did last year, which was really successful, involved cooperation with Scholastic and I want to say Target, they had a build-a-book workshop. Scholastic and Target donated all the Build-a-Book kits. They had a language arts training and stressed how books are so important to kids. They were given information on good children’s literature, and the children got their own book kit and with their parents they got to sit and build a book and they got to write whatever story they wanted to write and they got to build the pictures with all those different craft things and it was something they got to take home with them.

I don’t think those folks will not ever forget. It was amazing to see those parents sit in the floor with their kids or at a table and put that book together just like they wanted it. So I don’t think those are negative and I think those will be associated with school in a positive way.

Beth explained that summer school can make a long-term difference with a student if:

They continue to go to summer school each year it will help with the summer slide. They are going to be reading, writing, speaking, and listening and they will continue with numeracy. They are not going to forget those skills if they continue to work on them during the summer.

Susan suggests the importance of continuing to learn over the summer can make a long-term difference:

Just getting print in front of you and getting some additional math in front of you helps. I think in summer school, and I am speaking for our district, they always say try to have some fun things and try to make it more motivating for students and we get away from that in the traditional school year.

Brandy suggested the following regarding summer school making a long-term difference in a student’s educational outcome:

I think it depends on the teacher and the program. Because if the student was with a teacher who didn’t want to be there or if the program was just extra work I don’t think it

would. I watched the teacher with the older students in the computer lab researching and I thought what a fun thing with those older kids to be involved in a big project and not in there playing games. I think if it is a small enough group it can make a big difference. If you have too many and it is twenty two and it's such a short time. That is just my opinion. It takes a hundred and eighty days with twenty kids. I think if it's a small enough group and the teacher has a small enough group and a positive attitude and activities are well planned I think you can make a difference.

Jennifer said that summer school could make a long-term difference, "If it's helping that child get up to grade level it's certainly going to make a difference. If it's challenging that kid and helping them like school that will make a difference." Becky suggested that:

It could be the moment when they get it. What they needed at the right time. During summer school you are not as stressed. If the students don't finish an assignment, then it's fine. I don't have to worry about the next standard I have to cover or what else I need to check off on my pacing guide. But then on the flip side I could see maybe someone not being as regimented as they should be.

Janice agreed that summer school could make a difference but that, "It depends on the teacher and the activities they focus on." Holly suggested that summer school offers a, "jumpstart and a lot of times the kids in summer school have such a positive benefit from it."

Summary

Chapter 4 presented an analysis of research data gathered from in-depth interviews. Interviews were conducted with 10 pre-Kindergarten through third grade summer school teachers in a school district in northeast Tennessee. The data were made more vivid through the teachers' descriptions of events and activities enacted throughout the process of summer school. A summary of findings is discussed in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Summer schools across the country purport to facilitate the remediation, enrichment, and improvement of student achievement. This study used a qualitative design to explore the perceptions of pre-Kindergarten through third grade elementary summer school teachers. Specifically, the study focused on teacher perceptions of their preparation for summer school, analysis of teacher effectiveness, evaluation of the program, and teacher attitudes toward students. The findings of this study were based on the responses of 10 summer school teachers during an interview session. In-depth interview sessions were used to gain insight into aspects of the teachers' perceptions of the summer school programming. Participating teacher's responses were used to identify patterns and themes.

Research Findings

Two introductory questions were used to prompt the participating teachers to think about the reason they participated in summer school and how they viewed it as part of their teaching career. Introductory question 1 was used to gain understanding into the teacher's motivation for teaching summer school and introductory question 2 examined how the teacher's job as a summer school teacher had changed her career.

Introductory Question 1: What was your motivation for teaching summers school?

Seven teachers mentioned that at least one motivating factor for teaching summer school was the extra money. Three of the participants shared the importance of staying in a routine as a teacher. Additionally it reminds teachers of how little the students know at the beginning of each

school year and how much educational growth can occur during that time. Two participants said that it was important for students to continue to learn over the summer and several expressed appreciation for having a relaxed setting and instructional flexibility.

Introductory Question 2: How did teaching summer school make a difference in your teaching career?

Introductory question 2 focused on how the participants perceived summer school teaching in reference to their teaching careers. Several of the participants taught different grade levels in summer school than during the traditional school year. A distinct theme mentioned was how interesting and beneficial it was for them to see how far students progress over the course of their time in school. Additionally, it strengthened their pedagogy by being able to teach a different grade level than the one they usually taught during the traditional school year. Another participant added that it reminded her of how to begin her traditional school year and how to appropriately assess her students' educational capacities and social development. Other participants shared that they often had the same students in their classroom during the traditional school year and that was beneficial to the teacher, parents, and the student. Participants shared that teaching summer school was refreshing because it was different than the regular school year.

Research Question 1: How do you know the teaching strategies implemented during summer school were effective and how did you evaluate your teaching strategies?

In summary of research question 1, all of the participants noted that they used a pre test and post test to monitor student growth from the beginning to the end of summer school. Some went on to share about how they were able to use the pretest to focus on individual instruction that the participants attributed to the small class size during summer school. Several participants spoke of observing the students and being able to see that the students were making gains. Five

of the participants noted that their test scores always improved; however, those students who attended regularly showed the greatest improvement in their posttest. Others noted the value in collaborating with a colleague.

Several participants shared their plan for teaching summer school this year, which implied that they had spent some time thinking about their teaching strategies. Also, they noted how they will involve parents and volunteers in their classroom in a different capacity than they had the prior year.

Research Question 2: Which organizational strategies implemented while teaching summer school were the most effective?

To gain insight into research question 2, participants were asked about the preparation they received for teaching summer school and if it was helpful. All the participants noted that there was a district wide organizational meeting. The information they received at that meeting included the school and grade level they would be teaching along with other pertinent information. Also, they were informed that they must use pre- and posttesting to demonstrate student growth. They were encouraged to focus their instruction on language art and math while implementing appropriate enrichment activities. The teachers also had a school site planning meeting.

Several of the teacher participants shared their experiences planning at the school level for summer school. The majority of them noted this as one of the most helpful parts of the organizational aspect of summer school. Some of the participants were visibly energized when discussing the activities they planned as a school during the summer. Participants noted that choosing a theme, creating food around the theme, dress up days, and other coordinating activities were among their favorite parts of organizational planning.

Other participants shared how they collaborated with another teacher to enhance their organizational strategies. Some shared about using another teacher to compensate for their weaker area of instruction. For example, a teacher with strength in reading and language arts would collaborate with a teacher who was stronger in math.

One of the themes that emerged through research question 2 was that teachers appreciate that no one prescribed for them exactly what to teach during the summer school setting. Many of them commented on how nice it was not to have pacing guides or summative assessments to worry about. Additionally, others commented that this provided a more laid back environment than the regular school year, which offered them more flexibility with students in various capacities. Some of them relished in the idea that they could experiment with the summer schools students, which in turn helped their instruction during the regular school year.

Another theme that surfaced through research question 2 was that summer school is different during the regular school year because of how it is organized. Participants noted that summer school incorporates more enrichment activities than the regular school year and regularly referred to summer school as more *fun* than the regular school year. Participants also noted that it is different because there are more students who attend that are in need of more remediation.

Many participants noted the hardship of having to work in another school or classroom; noting how hard it was to pack up their instructional materials and how it always seemed like they had left something helpful behind. The participants also shared how they were apprehensive to be in another teacher's classroom because they were concerned that the room could be damaged.

Another theme that emerged when talking about organizational strategies was the small class size. The participants noted it as one of the most beneficial organizational strategies implemented in summer school. Several of the veteran teachers shared that when they did have a larger summer school class it was very difficult to accomplish their goals.

Research Question 3: What changes could school districts make in order to make summer school more effective?

When participants were first asked this question, a few of them had difficulty thinking beyond the parameters of the current summer school system in which they worked. However, several participants spiritedly answered the question and enjoyed sharing their ideas and opinions.

One theme that was extracted was that the teachers would like to see more enrichment activities during summer school. The activities that the participant noted were guest speakers and field trips. It was also mentioned that hiring a certified music and art teacher to work with the summer school students would be beneficial.

The incorporation of technology was important to several participants in making summer school more effective. Teachers noted that a theme for summer school also helped make it more effective. Several summer school teachers mentioned that they wished the structure of summer school would look to preparing students for the next school year instead of spending time remediating them.

Some of the participants also mentioned that perhaps the time frame for summer school could be altered to make it more effective while others were very pleased with the time frame. One suggested that summer school should be limited to 4 weeks, but it should be moved closer to the start of school. Others suggested that summer school should be longer.

Some of the changes suggested revolve around organizational strategies. Two participants mentioned letting teachers stay in their classrooms as a key factor to make summer school more effective. Several others mentioned smaller class sizes. Another suggested that teachers need to be hired to teach summer school in a grade where they are qualified to teach, perhaps with experience in that grade level. Also, participants mentioned that an eager and enthusiastic teacher can make summer school more effective for the students. Several mentioned that serving meals was an important factor for making summer school effective.

Research Question 4: How did your participation, as a teacher in summer school, make a long-term difference in students' educational outcome?

Four interview questions guided the research to gain insight into research question 4.

Interview Question 4-1: How did you make a difference with the students? Would you share a particular example? In summary of interview question 4-1, all of the summer school teachers said that they made a difference with their students. Participants noted both academic and social gains as areas in which they were able to help students improve. Several mentioned the posttest as evidence that they made a difference with students. Many of the participants also implied that working as a summer school teacher also made a difference for the teacher the students will have during the following school year.

All of the teachers were able to share an antidotal story regarding how they made a difference with a particular student. The participants were very proud to share their stories. Several of them even followed up with the students after summer school to check on their progress.

Interview Question 4-2: How does attending a summer school program prepare a student for the next grade level? One theme that appeared through interview question 4-2 was the importance for students to maintain a routine. The routine was twofold. First just getting up early and attending school and second many of the teachers emphasized that maintaining the learning routine and continuing to focus on academics helps students be successful in the next grade level.

Another idea that emerged through interview question 4-2 is that the participants used summer school as the venue to inform parents and students what the expectations were for the next grade level. Some of the teachers even requested to teach the student they might have in their classroom during the following school year.

Interview Question 4-3: How did you inspire students to be successful in the next grade level? Several participants mentioned the small size as providing a more intimate setting where the teacher can build relationships with the students. Others added that by making summer school more fun than the traditional school year, students could associate learning with a positive rather than a negative experience. The participants associated the positive nature of summer school with inspiring students to be successful in school. The teachers also emphasized the home-to-school connection by saying it was important for everyone to push the child to be his or her best.

Interview Question 4-4: Can you explain how summer school can make a long-term difference in a student's educational experience? In summary of interview question 4-4, all of the participants said that summer school had the potential of making a long term difference in students' educational outcomes. One of the reasons some of them initially chose to teach was because they saw the importance of keeping a learning momentum during the summer. Several of the participants noted that whether a difference is made often hinges on the teacher.

One of the themes is that teachers place value on the importance of the teacher in the summer school program. They said that the work a teacher does can make a difference with students. Also, they said it is important that the teacher make connections with students' parents.

Teachers said that they deeply believe that they can make a difference with students by keeping them in an educational setting and in the learning routine. Also, saying that by teaching summer school they are contributing to their students' lifetime success.

Recommendations to Improve Practice

Based on the 10 teacher participants in this study the initial recommendations focus on the four research areas explored in the study. These recommendations are only expressive of the teachers who participated in this study and cannot be generalized to all summer school teachers.

The first recommendation is to maximize their realm of influence; summer school teachers need to be offered the opportunity to teach in an environment where they are most comfortable. Also noted is that several summer school teachers in this study cited money as one of the reasons they initially wanted to teach. However also noteworthy is that a few participants wanted to keep in the routine of teaching and did not favor the break.

The second recommendation is related to summer school teachers' perception that they make the most difference with students when there is a small class size. It was also noted by Buchanan (2007) that small class size could be one factor that led to the success of a summer program entitled *Summer Bridge*. In a summer program where students made significant gains in word reading and listening, the school district noted small class size as one possible reason for student success (Denton et al., 2010). Cooper et al. (2000) found that summer remedial programs have the greatest effect when they offer small class sizes.

The next recommendation is that summer school should be different than the regular school year in order to appropriately engage students and maximize student learning. This mirrors what Kelleher (2003) noted that the creativity of one summer school program increased test scores and students maintained academic growth through the subsequent school year.

Also, summer school teachers in this study appreciate the flexible teaching strategies they can implement during summer school. They value their ability to be creative and more relaxed during summer school. This is similar to what Keiler (2010) noted in a case study that students who were remanded to a summer school stated that they liked summer school because their teacher made learning fun. When the Minneapolis Public Schools changed summer school programs because of low attendance to a more flexible, practical curriculum the attendance increased by 40% and the qualitative data derived suggested that the students enjoyed attending summer school (Kielsmeier, 1996).

It is the perception of the participating summer school teachers that enrichment activities in addition to traditional academic activities are very beneficial to students – especially during the summer. This is noted in what Entwisle et al. (2001) suggested in their *faucet theory* that posits that when school is in session the faucet is running for all students but when school is closed the faucet is turned off and some families cannot compensate for the resources the school has been providing. Also noted in Schacter and Jo (2005) is that students who attended summer school and focused on reading as well as on spending time participating in enrichment activities saw a greater increase in reading comprehension.

Participating summer school teachers indicated that parental engagement during summer school is as important as during the regular school year. Cale (1992) noted that parental contacts

were an important component to student success in a summer credit recovery program. Similarly Ponder et al. (2004) offered that part of student success was due to high parental involvement.

Recommendations for Further Research

It is recommended that research improving student achievement be analyzed using summer school pretesting and posttesting. Additionally, students could be monitored for future growth that may be tied to their summer school attendance as compared to non summer school attendees.

Another recommendation is for a longitudinal study of summer school teachers. Researchers could follow teachers over the course of several summer school sessions. The purpose of this type of study would be to explore the attitudes and development of summer school teachers. In addition, changes and modifications could be made so that teachers feel appropriately supported in order to deliver more effective teaching and programming.

Further examination could be conducted to expand the geographical region of this study. By examining teachers' perceptions of summer school in urban and rural summer schools more ideas and themes could be analyzed. This information would be useful to disaggregate and evaluate components of successful summer school programs.

As a result of the information obtained in this study, it is recommended that summer school teacher attrition be examined. Some of the teachers who no longer wish to teach summer school should be included in research. Perhaps school districts can adjust how they select and assign teachers based on the information they collect. This could lead to teachers having a more realistic idea about what to expect before they are contracted to teach in the summer program.

Another recommendation is to use teacher effect data to analyze the effect of summer school on a student's academic achievement. These data could be compared to nonsummer

school teachers. This could give teachers greater insight into the academic gains students may be making as a result of attending summer school.

Further research could be conducted by interviewing all school stakeholders. Principals, district personnel, and other community participants could be surveyed and interviewed regarding their opinions on what makes a successful summer school. Further research would offer school systems more information on how to create and implement effective summer programs.

An additional recommendation is to collect data through interviews and surveys from parents and students on how they perceive the summer school program. By conducting interviews and surveys, the organizers of summer school programs could obtain information about the strength and limitations included in present program components. This could lead to redevelopment and improvement of summer programming.

Concluding Statement

To maximize student learning and continually improve instruction, it is essential to constantly try to improve and examine the processes involved in creating a summer school program. Through this qualitative study, teachers have been given the opportunity to examine the process of teaching summer school and share their thoughts on how to create an effective summer school program.

Based on the themes that emerged from this study, recommendations were made to strengthen existing summer school programs. Other school systems may gain insights from this study that assist them in creating a quality summer program that maximizes student achievement and empowers successful teachers. Findings from this qualitative research study may help fill a

gap in the existing research literature by adding to knowledge about teachers' perceptions of their role and realm of influence as a summer school teacher.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Letter to School Systems

Dear Director of Schools,

My name is Kari Arnold. I am currently a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University. My dissertation topic focuses on summer school programs and specifically the perceptions of pre-Kindergarten through high school summer school teachers' views on the summer program in which they taught. In addition, specific emphasis is placed on preparation for summer school, analysis of teacher effectiveness, evaluation of the program, and teacher attitudes toward students. In order to proceed with this portion of my research, I am seeking volunteers for the interview portion of my study. These interviews would be conducted strictly on a voluntary basis and would not interfere with the teachers' contract time or the learning environment. In addition, I am happy to provide any supplemental information as needed.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kari Arnold
ETSU Doctoral Student
zkaw2@goldmail.etsu.edu

APPENDIX B

Approval Letter

January 7, 2013

Dear Director of Schools,

My name is Kari Arnold. I am currently a doctoral student at East Tennessee State University. My dissertation topic focuses on summer school programs and specifically the perceptions of pre-kindergarten through high school summer school teachers' views on the summer program in which they taught. In addition, specific emphasis is placed on preparation for summer school, analysis of teacher effectiveness, evaluation of the program, and teacher attitudes toward students. In order to proceed with this portion of my research, I am seeking volunteers for the interview portion of my study. These interviews would be conducted strictly on a voluntary basis and would not interfere with the teachers' contract time or the learning environment. In addition, I am happy to provide any supplemental information as needed.

Thank you for your consideration.



Kari Arnold
ETSU Doctoral Student
Zkaw2@goldmail.etsu.edu

Give permission for Kari Arnold to conduct this research in [redacted] County Schools

1/8/2013

Date

APPENDIX C

Teacher Interview Instrument

Interview Guide

Name

School System

Years of Experience

Level of Education

Introductory Questions:

1. What was your motivation for teaching summer school?
2. How did teaching summer school make a difference in your teaching career?

RQ1. How do you know the teaching strategies implemented during summer school were effective and how did you evaluate your teaching strategies?

- 1-1. What evidence do you have that your teaching strategies were effective?
- 1-2. How did you evaluate your teaching strategies?

RQ2. Which organizational strategies implemented while teaching summer school were the most effective?

- 2-1. What preparation did you receive for teaching summer school?
- 2-2. Did the preparation program help to prepare you for teaching summer school?

RQ3. What changes could school districts make in order to make summer school more effective?

- 3-1. If you were designing a summer school program to maximize student learning, what would that look like?

RQ4. How did your participation, as a teacher in summer school, make a long term difference in students' educational outcome?

- 4-1. How did you make a difference with the students? Would you share a particular example?
- 4-2. How does attending a summer school program prepare a student for the next grade level?
- 4-3. How did you inspire students to be successful in the next grade level?
- 4-4. How can summer school make a long-term difference in a student's educational experience?

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent Form

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD INTRODUCTION

Summer school programs are used across the nation to remediate and enrich a spectrum of students. These programs often give teachers the opportunity to provide instruction in a different way than during the traditional school year. The topic of this study focuses on the perceptions of pre-kindergarten through elementary school summer school teachers' views on the summer program in which they taught. In addition, specific emphasis is placed on preparation for summer school, analysis of teacher effectiveness, evaluation of the program, and teacher attitudes toward students. This is crucial in detecting which aspects of summer programs facilitate student success.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of pre-kindergarten through high school summer school teachers' views on the summer program in which they taught. The study emphasis was on preparation for summer school, analysis of teacher effectiveness, evaluation of the program, and teacher attitudes toward students.

This purpose of this study fosters a qualitative design used to examine the perceptions of pre-kindergarten through high school summer school teachers' views on the summer program in which they taught. The study will explore the components that the summer school teachers perceived as the most effective strategies in order to foster student success. This study applies a phenomenological approach to evaluate the perceptions of the summer school teachers. The utilization of this methodology offers information about the summer school teachers' opinions in regard to the most effective aspects of the summer programs in which they participated. The experiences of the summer school teachers will be evaluated in terms of commonality and patterns of the participant responses.

DURATION

Each participant will be asked to share information through an interview session. This session will last approximately one hour per participant.

PROCEDURES

The instrument to be used in this study is a face to face interview. Interviews will be conducted individually utilizing the same panel of questions for each participant. The interviews offer a semi structured format that consist of the participants being asked specific questions, while also allowing each participant to voluntarily expand on his or her thoughts. Interviews will be taped, allowing participants the opportunity to review and approve the responses. With your consent you will be emailed your interview transcript to facilitate review of your session. After review of your transcript you will be asked to respond with any changes or approval.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES/TREATMENTS

No alternative procedures or treatment will be used in this study.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORT

There are no anticipated risks for individuals participating in this study. Identity confidentiality will be utilized with the responses. Participants may choose to quit or refuse to participate at any time.

APPROVED
By the ETSU IRB

FEB 04 2013

By 
Chair IRB Coordinator

DOCUMENT VERSION EXPIRES

102

FEB 03 2014

ETSU IRB

POSSIBLE BENEFITS

The possible benefit(s) of this study includes allowing each individual to express his or her opinion in a confidential forum.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in this research is voluntary.

You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time. If you quit or refuse to participate, the benefits or treatment to which you are otherwise entitled will not be affected. You may quit by calling Kari Arnold, whose phone number is 423/341-8105. You will be told immediately if any of the results of the study should reasonably be expected to make you change your mind about staying in the study.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

If you have any questions, problems or research-related medical problems at any time, you may call Kari Arnold 423/341-8105, or Dr. James Lampley at 423/439-1000. You may call the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at 423/439-6054 for any questions you may have about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can't reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423/439-6055 or 423/439/6002.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of the records from this study will be stored in Gray, TN, for at least 5 years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a subject. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, or ETSU IRB and personnel from East Tennessee State University's Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis Program have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above.

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you. You will be given a signed copy of this informed consent document. You have been given the chance to ask questions and to discuss your participation with the investigator. You freely and voluntarily choose to be in this research project.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT DATE

PRINTED NAME OF PARTICIPANT DATE

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR DATE

SIGNATURE OF WITNESS (if applicable)

APPROVED
By the ETSU IRB
FEB 04 2013
By *aa*
Chair IRB Coordinator

DOCUMENT VERSION EXPIRES
FEB 03 2014
ETSU IRB

APPENDIX E

IRB Approval



East Tennessee State University

Office for the Protection of Human Research Subjects • Box 70565 • Johnson City, Tennessee 37614-1707
Phone: (423) 439-6053 Fax: (423) 439-6060

IRB APPROVAL – Initial Expedited Review

February 4, 2013

Kari Arnold

Re: Summer School in an Upper East Tennessee School District
IRB#: c0113.2s
ORSPA #:

The following items were reviewed and approved by an expedited process:

- xform New Protocol Submission; Informed Consent Document* (stamped approved 2/4/13); Interview Question Guide; Letter to Directors; CV

The item(s) with an asterisk(*) above noted changes requested by the expedited reviewers.

On **February 4, 2013**, a final approval was granted for a period not to exceed 12 months and will expire on **February 3, 2014**. The expedited approval of the study *and* requested changes 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 (no version date, stamped approved 2/4/13)

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,
Chris Ayres, Chair
ETSU Campus IRB

cc:

VITA

KARI ALISON WITCHER ARNOLD

Education:

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN

Ed.D., Educational Leadership, May 2013.

Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, TN

Ed.S., Administration and Supervision, 2009.

East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN

M.A., School Counseling, 2002.

Milligan College, Milligan College, TN

B.A., Psychology, 2000.

Professional Experience:

Washington County Schools, Johnson City, TN

Director of Asbury Alternative High School, 2009 to Present

Washington County Schools, Johnson City, TN

School Counselor, 2002 to 2009