The Effects of a Reading Intervention Class on Regular Education
High School Students Who Struggle with Learning

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The Effects of a Reading Intervention Class on Regular Education High School Students Who Struggle with Learning

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(ABSTRACT)

The purpose of this study was to examine a reading initiative that was implemented with struggling 9th grade regular education students at a high school in northern Virginia. Pre and post tests of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT), 4th Edition, were used to measure the reading performance of students enrolled in a reading intervention class compared to those in a control group. Attendance and discipline data were also collected and compared. Discussions with students enrolled in the reading class and representative artifacts (student work in portfolios, field notes from classroom observations and interview transcriptions) provided contextual elements to the study.

The quantitative results of the study were mixed. There was no statistically significant difference between students enrolled in the reading intervention class compared to those in the control group on academic performance, attendance, or behavior. Participants in the reading class scored higher on scanning ($F (1, 29) = 11.21, p = .00$) and vocabulary ($F (1, 29) = 5.96, p = .02$) than those in the control group.

Qualitative results indicated that students enrolled in the reading class who learned comprehension, scanning, and vocabulary strategies did not uniformly apply them during reading in core content areas (English, mathematics, science and social studies).
Dedication

The dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Fred, and our three children, Rebecca, Sarah, and David. They gave me the strength to complete this project, and stood by me when the going got tough. They are a supportive, wonderful crew. I would be lost without them.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The effect of high-stakes testing on instructional programs at all levels of public schooling is well recognized (Allington, 2002). Teachers and administrators are under enormous pressure to meet or exceed state standards. There is a mandate to cover curriculum objectives, often at the expense of student understanding of content. Students are expected to read and understand text by the time they reach the middle school years, but often content meaning eludes them (Worthy, Broaddus, & Ivey, 2001). Rather than a vehicle for understanding, reading is viewed as an institutional task. Students read words, but struggle with comprehension.

This problem is exacerbated at the high school level where reading for understanding increases across content areas. What can teachers do to assist these at-risk readers? Whose responsibility is it to improve the reading skills of secondary students? I have witnessed the frustration of many high school students who have sat in my office for disciplinary offenses borne out of disconnects in the classroom. They often can read words, but do not understand the information printed in their textbooks. A lack of comprehension frequently leads to additional problems for youngsters. Juel, Griffith, and Gough (1996) determined that students with poor reading skills frequently have lower self-esteem, encounter more disciplinary difficulties, and are less likely to graduate than more adept readers.

Reading and comprehension skills are particularly important in light of the federal mandate that every student make adequate yearly progress under the federal "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB) legislation of 2001. Reading First, the largest component of NCLB, underscores the importance of effective reading instruction for students enrolled in kindergarten through third grade, a pivotal learning period. Inadequate reading instruction during the early years affects academic success in subsequent years of schooling (Berger & Gunn, 2003). This is sometimes exacerbated by lackluster support of reading at home, particularly in the case of disadvantaged or minority children; hence, poor readers often lag further behind. The purpose of the legislation is to reduce the achievement gap between those students and their more academically successful
peers by implementing reading programs that are scientifically based (Fitzgerald, Morrow, Gambrell, Calfee, Venezky, Woo, & Dromsky, 2002).

Prior to the NCLB legislation, the National Reading Panel (National Institute of Child Health & Human Development, 2000) issued a report identifying five instructional areas that lead to reading success--phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. The Panel outlined an instructional approach for each component based on “scientifically-based reading research” (Padak, Rasinski, & Mraz, 2002, p. 2). The Reading First legislation provides federal money to local school districts to select and implement reading programs that are scientifically based, but such autonomy is limited. Programs must first meet Reading First requirements and guidelines that school officials often find confusing and convoluted. Unfortunately, the funds are limited to reading instruction at the elementary level, despite the mandate under NCLB that all students make adequate yearly progress.

Statement of the Problem

The challenge of comprehending and analyzing expository text found in high school curricula can be overwhelming. For struggling readers, adequate yearly progress is a pipedream. They quickly develop negative attitudes toward reading--and schooling in general--and feel disenfranchised from the very system that is supposed to be teaching them. Tragically, they begin a downward spiral of failure. Irwin (2002) found that low achievement in literacy was correlated to high rates of school drop-out, poverty, and underemployment.

With the implementation of NCLB, instructional leaders have been mandated to ensure that all students make adequate yearly progress. Although much has been done to meet this requirement at the elementary level, only band-aid approaches have been attempted in high schools. Ineffective mentoring or remediation programs targeted to raise standardized test scores do not quash the need for direct instruction of students who struggle with basic reading or comprehension deficiencies. The time has come to examine what high schools can do to address this problem. Research-based instructional leadership by school administrators is imperative. In a case study of eight low-performing Chicago schools, DeMoss (2002) found that improvement in student
achievement was linked to principals who implemented systemic change that was curriculum based rather than test-driven, included teachers in instructional decisions, and demonstrated a commitment to high achievement. Principals must foster a "professional community that best supports their students" (p. 131).

Principal as Instructional Leader

The principal as instructional leader is critical to establishing a school culture that supports reading to learn at the secondary level. Edmonds (1981) suggested that teachers within a school should look to the principal for instructional leadership. This belief was echoed by Green (1994) who stressed the importance of leadership by the school principal in ensuring effective instructional programs and Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (1995) who identified curriculum development as an integral component of educational leadership.

Such concepts are supported in the standards of the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (2002), which stipulate that principals should “demonstrate the ability to assist school personnel in understanding and applying best practices for student learning” (p. 5). The role of the principal in establishing instructional programs that address NCLB and adequate yearly progress is critical. Moreover, the relationship between the principal as instructional leader and overall student achievement cannot be denied (Hallinger & Heck, 1996)

As instructional leaders, principals must model best practices and introduce instructional programs that are research-based. Principals must effectively communicate clear expectations for instruction and collaborate with teachers to develop programs that meet the diverse needs of all learners. To do otherwise results in inconsistent implementation of instructional programs. Avila (1990) found that ambiguous instructional leadership resulted in misguided perceptions by teachers. This concept was later extended by Brewer (1993) who proposed, “While formulation of clear educational goals is important, principals with academically oriented goals who transmit these to their teachers are likely to have the most impact on student achievement” (p. 282). Communicating high expectations for learning cannot be accomplished in the
isolation of the principal’s office. Maintaining high visibility is crucial to teachers, students and members of the school community at large.

In concert with lead teachers and other stakeholders, effective instructional leaders should consider the particular circumstances of their schools, identify the specific needs of students, and utilize assessment data to determine a common instructional focus (Danielson, 2002). Ultimately, however, it is up to the principal to define the school’s mission and establish the instructional climate. Lezotte (1994) cautioned, “People follow effective leaders because they share the leader’s dreams, not because they are afraid of what would happen to them if they did not follow” (p. 22).

Heck (1992) found that instructional leadership by definition is ambiguous and often derailed by contextual elements within the school -- its size, maintenance, budget, teacher performance, curriculum coordination, and extent of administrative responsibilities. Krug (1992) suggested instructional leadership could be described using five dimensions: (a) a succinct school mission; (b) informed curriculum management; (c) teacher supervision; (d) monitoring student progress, and (e) a positive learning environment. How to allocate sufficient time to address these dimensions is a pervasive problem with most principals, resulting in an incessant frustration with the role (Heck, 1992; Rowan & Denk, 1984).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a reading class on regular high school students who struggle academically. Students enrolled in the class were given direct instruction in reading, with emphasis on building comprehension skills. I wanted to know how regular education students who struggled with reading comprehension responded to formal reading instruction in the high school setting. The intent was to provide insight for principals who wish to establish instructional programs for regular education high school students who struggle with reading and do not make adequate yearly progress.

The NCLB legislation of 2001 mandates that individual states define adequate yearly progress in terms of students moving toward academic proficiency. Adequate yearly progress is measured by meeting absolute targets, making annual relative
growth, or narrowing the achievement gap by reducing the percentage of students scoring at the lowest performance levels on standards of learning assessments (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2003).

Currently, one third of secondary students do not read at appropriate grade levels. Findings of the National Assessment of Educational Progress indicated that 30 percent of 8th and 12th grade students in 1994 lacked sufficient reading skills (Buehl, 1998). A similar finding emerged from the 1997 Wisconsin Student Assessment of 10th graders. Twenty-nine percent of sophomores scored below the normal range (Buehl, 1998).

Many secondary students can complete basic reading tasks, but are unable to think critically. Often they lack strategic reading skills. Richardson and Morgan (1994) suggested that effective readers must be able to analyze content and that such analysis must be active and interdependent, resulting in strategies that positively affect future reading. Beers (2003) proposed that effective reading comprehension was both a product and process requiring purposeful, strategic effort.

Teachers can provide at-risk readers with learning opportunities that address reading comprehension deficiencies without increasing curriculum objectives. It is essential that educators recognize their students’ reading difficulties, utilize pedagogical practices that reinforce comprehension skills, and cultivate critical thinking and independent thought. Reading to learn at the high level is the key to making adequate yearly progress. If students are able to read with purpose and comprehend what they are reading, academic achievement may increase (Burns, 2001; Ivey, 1999; Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, & Solar, 2002; Richardson & Morgan, 1994).

The Research Questions

Three questions guided the research. First, how does enrollment in a reading improvement course affect the reading comprehension, vocabulary, and scanning abilities of struggling ninth grade readers as measured by pre and post tests? Secondly, does enrollment in a reading improvement course have a transfer effect on attendance, problematic behavior, and/or academic performance of struggling ninth graders? Finally,
how does enrollment in a reading improvement course affect school experiences as perceived by ninth graders?

Definitions

Struggling readers were defined as regular education ninth graders who failed at least two state assessments of the Virginia Standards of Learning in the eighth grade. Students who required special education services and those with limited English proficiency were excluded. Alverman (2001) defined struggling readers as "adolescents who for whatever reason are unable to keep up with the reading demands of the school curriculum" (p. 679).

Reading comprehension was defined as the ability to give "collective meaning to words by accessing prior knowledge and utilizing word recognition skills" (Collins & Collins, 2002). Beers (2003) defined vocabulary as the "acquisition, use, and remembering of words." Scanning was defined as the ability to preview text and "identify specific target words within that text to clarify the purpose for reading" (Richardson & Morgan, 1994). The reading comprehension, vocabulary, and scanning skills of ninth grade students involved in the study were measured using pre and post tests of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT), Fourth Edition, grades 9-12. Form J was used for pre-testing; Form K was used for post testing. Both a control group and treatment group were pre and post tested using these forms.

Attendance was defined as being present in class. Attendance was recorded and monitored using the Student Attendance and Student Information (SASI) software system. A comparison was made between the eighth and ninth grade years of attendance by students in the reading class and students in the control group. Data were collected by running attendance summaries of the students.

Problematic behavior was defined as cutting class, disrupting instruction, fighting, showing disrespect towards a staff member, cheating, violating the weapons ban, and alcohol, drug, or tobacco use. A comparison of problematic behavior between the eighth and nine grade years was measured using the number of discipline referrals of students in the two groups. Data were collected by running discipline summaries of the students using the Referral Discipline Incident and Injury (REDI) software system.
Academic performance was defined as grade point averages on a 4.0 scale in English, mathematics, science, and world history, and as scores on the earth science Virginia Standards of Learning assessment. (Proficiency on any VA SOL begins with a score of 400.) SOL data from the VA Department of Education was sent to schools in June 2004.

School experience was defined in terms of a student's perceptions about his or her academic success in school. Three domains of interest were explored through interviews: instruction, reading strategies, and self-analysis of reading. Interview questions are listed in Appendix A. To ensure validity of the interview questions and domains, a survey protocol was developed and implemented. See Appendix B.

The reading improvement class was defined as a year-long elective course of study that met for ninety minutes every other day. The class was designed to provide direct instruction in reading, with emphasis on building comprehension skills. Reading in the content areas of science and world history were included. Course components are listed in Appendix C.

Operational definitions of all variables are listed in Table 1.
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<td>Collective meaning to words using prior knowledge and word recognition skills</td>
<td>Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, pre and post test scores</td>
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<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>Acquisition, use and remembering of words</td>
<td>Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, pre and post test scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scanning</td>
<td>Ability to preview test and identify specific target words within text to clarify purpose of reading</td>
<td>Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, pre and post test scores</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>Being present in class</td>
<td>Number of days absent as measured by Student Attendance and Student Information software system</td>
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<tr>
<td>Problematic behavior</td>
<td>Cutting class, disruptive behavior, fighting, disrespect, cheating, violation of weapons band, alcohol, drug, or tobacco use, or other inappropriate behavior as identified in Code of Behavior</td>
<td>Number of discipline referrals entered into the Referral Discipline Incident and Injury software system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic performance</td>
<td>Grades earned in English, mathematics, science, and world history</td>
<td>End-of-year grade point averages in four core content areas based on 4.0 scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic performance</td>
<td>Proficiency on Virginia Standards of Learning Science Assessment</td>
<td>Proficiency on any VA SOL assessment begins with score of 400</td>
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CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Two fundamental questions directed the analysis of the literature review. First, what are the characteristics of effective reading strategies that promote comprehension? Second, what research methods were used to examine the effectiveness of these strategies? The purpose of the review was to critically analyze research in the field of reading in order to establish a context upon which to base my own study. Additionally, I wanted to explore the efficacy of reading improvement programs at the secondary level.

The literature review began by accessing the ERIC database using keywords "reading strategies" and "reading intervention." The result was a deluge of studies and other publications. The list was filtered using the following criteria: reading comprehension, reading in the content area (secondary education), and at-risk readers. It should be noted that many reading intervention programs exist at the elementary level, but few exist at the secondary level (Langer, 2001). For that reason, some studies of elementary reading programs were included in the literature review. However, beginning-to-read elementary studies were excluded. Both quantitative and qualitative studies were included in the literature review, along with books written by leading researchers in the field of reading (e.g., Allington, 1996, 2001; Applebee, 1994; Barr, Kamil, Mosenthal, & Pearson, 1991; Beers, 2003; Burns, 2001; Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 1995; Pressley, 2001; Richardson & Morgan, 1994; Tovani, 2000; Worthy, Broaddus, & Ivey, 2001; Worthy & McKool, 1996). As the literature review expanded, entries were coded according to two emerging foci: basic skills and reading comprehension. Published studies were found in peer-reviewed journals; unpublished studies were found among papers presented at conferences. Books and other journal articles provided a foundation on which to develop a comprehensive understanding of reading intervention at the secondary level.

Two reading problems were found throughout the literature on struggling readers--a deficiency of basic skills and poor reading comprehension skills. Studies in both classifications included many instructional strategies.
Consistency in the Studies

In the studies examined, thematic consistency emerged in the findings even though research was conducted at different locations under varying circumstances. Three themes surfaced. First, poor reading comprehension is a result of inadequate training and insufficient practice in expressing thought and applying reason. Second, comprehension cannot occur if one is unable to apply basic reading skills. Third, with appropriate intervention strategies and time, basic skills and reading comprehension can be improved for a regular education student who is a struggling reader. Differences in the studies included grade levels of subjects (elementary vs. secondary) and types of studies (quantitative vs. qualitative). The focus of all studies was on instruction in reading through school reinforcement. Three elements were identified as key components: curriculum and reading programs, instructional strategies, and teacher and student interaction. A theory of reading competency is shown in Figure 1.
Figure 1. A theory of reading competence.
Instruction in Reading

The literature included many references (Allington, 1994, 2002; Beers, 2003; Braunger & Lewis, 1997; Irwin, 2002; Langer, 2001; Lloyd, 1996; Pressley, 1997, 2001; Rasinski & Padak, 2001; Slavin, 1996; Tovani, 2000) to the instructional implications of reading. The concept that reading enables students to become independent, self-sufficient learners was posited numerous times throughout the review (Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001; Harmon, 2002; Worthy, Broaddus, & Ivey, 2001). According to Rex (2001), reading is a "socio-cultural experience"--students enjoy reading and discussing books or other material. However, some students experience reading only as a school-centered function or task, for which they receive little or no gratification.

As children enter their middle school years, many become reluctant readers who lack effective reading strategies (Ivey, 1999). To these children, the challenge of comprehending and analyzing expository text becomes overwhelming. Negative attitudes toward reading begin to gel and a frustration level is established (McKenna, Kear & Ellsworth, 1995).

The literature uses many different terms for these reluctant readers who struggle with comprehension, including slow reader, low reader, or disabled reader (Alverman, 2001); however, Beers (2003) cautioned, "Anyone can struggle given the right text. The struggle isn't the issue; the issue is what the reader does when the text gets tough" (p. 15).

In a qualitative case study, Ivey (1999) examined the reading performance of three students in sixth grade classrooms located in a rural middle school in the southeastern United States. The study took place during the 1996-97 academic year. Purposeful sampling utilizing two filters--students who were able to articulate their experiences as readers and students with varying reading abilities--was employed. Data collection occurred over a five-month period and included field notes, interviews, and shared readings with individual students. Data were analyzed, compared, and coded according to categories. A negative-case analysis was conducted suggesting some evidence to establish credibility of results. Ivey determined that a misalignment between individual student needs or interests and instruction led to
disengagement with reading. Findings of the study indicated that these middle school students were complex and multidimensional readers. They responded positively to a curriculum that was interdisciplinary, provided student choice, and promoted reading with purpose. While a qualitative study of this magnitude is not generalizeable, findings do provide insight to the efficacy of examining and responding to the individual instructional needs of readers.

Tovani (2000) defined two types of at-risk readers most often encountered at the high school level. Resistive readers are those who choose not to read; word callers are those who can decode words, but cannot derive meaning or apply critical thinking to what has been read. As a result, words often become obstacles rather than bridges to understanding. A reading class designed to improve the comprehension of students must include strategies for overcoming both the inability to read and the lack of desire to read.

Allington and Cunningham (1996) identified direct instruction of reading and time to read as important pedagogical issues for struggling readers. Time to read in class was also supported by Irwin (2002). In a research monograph on reading, Braunger and Lewis (1997) reported that “students get better at reading by simply reading, and that actual reading time is a crucial factor in becoming a successful reader” (p. 54). Conversely, lack of reading during the school day negatively affects reading development (Allington, 2001). Goodlad (1984) reported that less than 2 percent of each school day is devoted to actual reading.

Morris, Ervin, and Conrad (1996), in a single case study, found that concentrated instructional effort in skill building and fluency by well-trained teachers resulted in positive outcomes for at-risk readers. The case study involved a sixth grade youngster of average intelligence living in western North Carolina. The boy read on a second grade level, and received special education services which did little to improve his reading performance. The researchers developed an instructional program that began with a careful analysis of the student's reading level. Instruction began at that level and incorporated the following components: (a) using reading material that had relevance for the student; (b) infusing discussion around reading selections to build comprehension skills; (c) assessing the student's word recognition skills and providing developmentally
appropriate word study, and (d) encouraging independent reading. Guided reading exercises were also embedded.

The researchers found that a balanced approach of instruction (phonics plus exposure to a variety of texts) and appropriate scaffolding--"guidance and support" (Applebee, 1994)--were essential to improved reading. Over a two-year period (78 hours of instruction), the student improved to a fourth grade level in reading and spelling. Initial instruction occurred in the summer over a one-month period, for approximately one hour per day, and began with an assessment of his reading ability. Subsequent instruction occurred the following school year, for one hour per week after school. Each session included guided reading (predicting, reading aloud, checking for understanding, questioning and reading silently), word study (focusing on vowel patterns and spelling), writing, and reading for pleasure (with dialogue between student and teacher). Annual assessments were conducted using a diagnostic spelling inventory that measures word recognition and spelling, and comparable sets of reading passages.

Though limited in scope, the study contributes to the literature on understanding how to teach reading. Instruction must begin with assessment, followed by appropriate skill development, coupled with guided reading. The ultimate goal is to produce competent readers who can employ effective comprehension strategies.

Many reading advocates (Allington, 2002; Greenleaf et al., 2001; Guthrie, Schafer, & Wang, 1995; Ivey, 1999; Pressley, 1997; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002) recommend a student-centered, constructivist approach that is interdisciplinary in nature. Atwell (1998) and Carbo (1997) amplified the importance of personal choice and interest in developing reading initiatives. These researchers supported the use of challenging (but not overwhelming) reading materials relevant to student interest that required thought and analysis. Both researchers suggested that student interest in reading materials was linked to motivation to read.

Atwell (1998), a middle school language arts teacher and action researcher, used her classroom as a living laboratory to learn about reading and writing from her students. Over a ten-year span she utilized observation, anecdotal records and classroom artifacts from her eighth grade students to identify instructional strategies that
had positive effects with 8th grade readers and writers. Eventually she developed a model for a reading and writing workshop. In this model, students actively engaged with the teacher and peers to read, write, edit, process, and make sense of text. The teacher moved from whole class instruction to small groups to individualized instruction, modeling strategies and supporting students as they developed reading and writing skills. Student choice, voice and constructive dialogue were integral components of the workshop. Academic progress was measured by individual growth rather than averaging class performance.

Worthy and McKool (1996) suggested that often adolescents do not struggle with the task of reading per se, they struggle with the expository text found in school books and assignments. Such students labor over unfamiliar or technical vocabulary. Some lack the ability to formulate questions. Many who cannot comprehend text simply give up. Beers (2003) suggested that "the challenge is not the language itself, but what the reader does to interpret the text." This is the essence of reading to learn across content areas at the high school level. Students must be able to think about what has been read, analyze it, and compare it to what is already known. The ability to comprehend text is the springboard to learning often missing in many high school classrooms.

Reading Programs

Curricular programs found in this review demonstrated common themes and approaches. Fuchs, Fuchs, and Kazdan (1999) found that high school special education students who participated in Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) improved reading comprehension through collaboration and dialogue. The PALS program incorporates a dyadic structure in which reading activities "require verbal interaction and feedback between tutors and tutees and with reciprocity of tutoring roles so that both students serve as tutor and tutee in each session" (p. 16). Three activities are emphasized: (a) partner reading; (b) paragraph shrinking (summarization), and (c) prediction. Each activity is designed to promote reading comprehension. Incentives are used to motivate readers. Expository text from content courses and purposeful, authentic reading material are most often used in conjunction with high school PALS.

Students enrolled in PALS classes (treatment group) and those not participating in PALS classes (control groups) were administered pre and post tests using the
Comprehensive Reading Assessment Battery. ANOVA revealed that students in both the treatment group and the control group increased the number of words read correctly as measured by pre and post tests (ES = .04; p<.05). The treatment group exceeded the control group (ES = .34, p < .05) in responding correctly to comprehension questions.

Student beliefs about reading were explored using a 5-point Likert scale. Five statements regarding working with peers and reading in general were measured: (a) I like helping other students (ES = .41, p < .05); (b) I like working with other students on reading (ES = .31, p < .07); (c) I like to read (ES = .02, p < .01); (d) I am a good reader (ES = .27, p < .01), and (e) I want to become a better reader (ES = .31, p < .01). Four additional statements addressed students’ involvement with reading improvement: (a) I have worked hard to improve reading skills (ES = .69, p < .01); (b) I have worked hard this year (ES = .67, p < .01); (c) I have worked hard in this class so I will make good grades (ES = .55, p < .05), and (d) My teacher has helped me to become a better reader (ES = .78, p < .001). Limitations of the study included a lack of data to explain what instruction occurred in the non-PALS classrooms compared to the specifics of what did occur in PALS classrooms and a lack of suitable reading texts at the high school level.

Rex (2001) conducted an ethnographic study of 27 students enrolled in a gifted and talented English literature classroom in an urban high school in Michigan. Seventeen of the students were labeled gifted; ten were general education students who had signed up for the class. The purpose of the study was to examine how students with varied reading abilities and diverse ethnic backgrounds analyzed, interpreted, and socially interacted with text in an advanced reading environment. The researcher immersed herself in the classroom for approximately one school year, video and audio taping class and individual discourse, recording field notes and observations, and conducting interviews with the teacher and students. Rex also collected classroom artifacts, such as reading logs, tests, quizzes, and journals. Two phases of data analysis were utilized. Phase I included a comparative analysis of data categorized according to (a) patterns of reading, writing, and speaking; (b) instructional practices; (c) cultural influences, and (d) patterns of student-to-student and student-to-teacher
dialogue. Phase II included identification of specific cases for deeper analysis, such as examining a unique teaching practice or scrutinizing the learning interactions of a particular student. Rex (2001) found that integral to becoming a competent reader was becoming a productive contributor to reading discussions and recognizing the importance of socially constructed knowledge which emanates from critical analysis and group discourse. A limitation of this study centered on a lack of analysis of the pre-existing cultural, socio-economic, and gender influences that may have affected classroom discourse.

Applebee (1994) suggested that to be beneficial, classroom discourse needed be established within a framework--who speaks when and what topics are appropriate. Both Rex (2001) and Applebee (1994) concluded that opportunities for open-ended dialogue and collaboration were key components of effective reading programs. Guthrie, Schafer, and Wang (1995) found, “A teacher's invitation to participate socially in discussion appears to increase the amount of reading and thinking related to texts within the instruction” (p. 11).

Another recurring strand in the literature centered on commercial reading programs and curricula. Richards (2001) stressed the importance of teachers' professional judgment in developing authentic reading programs and questioned the validity of commercially produced generic reading ventures. Teacher expertise in the reading process, instructional strategies, and the learning environment can affect how students develop as readers. Richards queried 144 students and 24 teachers in Mississippi using interviews and open-ended surveys. Teachers were asked to complete the Deford Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP), an instrument designed to convey information about a teacher's phonics, skills, or whole language teaching proclivities. Data analysis revealed that 9 teachers utilized a phonics orientation to reading instruction while 15 implemented a skills-based approach. The study unveiled significant gaps and discrepancies in teachers' knowledge about reading instruction. Few respondents implemented specific lessons designed to promote comprehension skills. Additionally, differentiation of instruction was minimized, and culturally responsive pedagogy was overlooked.
Students responded to open-ended surveys in the Richards study. Most expressed murky conceptions about reading. A majority expressed the need for teachers to offer choice in reading selections and to implement a variety of instructional strategies to assist them with comprehending text. Examples included read-alouds, cooperative learning groups, interactive reading activities, and varying instruction from whole group to individualized tutelage. Many students also indicated an interest in computer-assisted instruction. Richards implored school district leaders and administrators "to carefully contemplate what they know about the teaching and learning of literacy and the complexities of the reading process" (p. 17).

Limitations of the study included the small number of participants--only six students in each class responded to survey questions--and qualitative data were not triangulated. In addition, there was no observation of actual reading instruction.

Early intervention programs such as Reading Recovery have had positive effects on the word recognition and comprehension skills of elementary students, but often have not improved fluency (Reid, 2001). Reading Recovery follows a structured format, balancing phonics with strategy instruction during scaffolded reading and writing. Students are removed from their classrooms for 30 minutes each day to receive one-to-one tutoring. During these guided reading sessions, students are taught reading strategies specific to their needs--learning how to apply context clues, emphasizing word families, clarifying meaning through questioning, and focusing on grammar and semantics. A variety of reading processes are utilized. Students read independently and silently, or aloud; repeat sentences the teacher has read (echo reading), or take turns reading aloud with the teacher (paired reading). Sometimes the students listen to a taped book and follow along silently. Throughout the process, students are instructionally guided as they attempt to make sense from text. As they develop reading skills, the teacher adds new levels of learning, always with the goal of improving comprehension.

Rasinski and Padak (2001) developed a model of instruction that builds fluency and includes modeling, direct instruction, and support during choral reading. Modified versions of such programs exist at the secondary level, most notably at middle school. Few exist at the high school level where reading to learn is the focus.
Accelerated Reader (AR) (Paul, VanderZee, Rue, & Swanson, 1996) is a commercially produced reading management system for students in kindergarten through high school. Developed in 1993 by Judith and Terrance Paul of the Institute for Academic Excellence, the underlying structure of the program is an integrated approach of practice, motivation, and ongoing (computerized) assessment to increase literacy. The program is incentive-driven and requires minimal teacher monitoring. Implementation at the secondary level is limited (Pavonetti, Brimmer & Cipielewski, 2002).

In a study by associates of the Texas Education Association, Paul et al. (1996) reported that Accelerated Reader had a measurable effect on the academic achievement and attendance rates of students who used the program. Texas was chosen for the study due to its similarity of demographics to the nation as a whole. (At the time of the study, approximately 80 percent of the population was urban compared to 75 percent for the nation; 25 percent of the population was non-Caucasian compared to 20 percent for the nation.)

The purpose of the study was to compare scores of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TASS) in schools that had implemented Accelerated Reader over varying amounts of time (less than 1 year; 1-2 years; 2-3 years, and 3 or more years) with a control group of schools that had not implemented Accelerated Reader. Thirty test-score categories were selected for analysis in grades 3 through 8 and grade 10 and included reading, math, and overall pass rates for each of the grades tested. In grades 4, 8, and 10 pass rates for writing were analyzed, and social studies and science pass rates were analyzed in grade 8.

Results indicated that schools that implemented Accelerated Reader showed a significantly better performance on the TASS than schools that did not use the program. With the exception of sixth and eighth graders, Z scores indicated statistical significance at a level of .01. There was no significant effect at grades 6 and 8.

One limitation of the study is that individual growth in reading by students will not be evident for those who do not make the minimum cut score. A second limitation centered on the researchers only investigating the influences of accelerated reader and not other factors in the classroom that may have affected student outcomes.
Success for All is an early intervention initiative targeted towards at-risk readers at the early elementary level (Slavin, 1996). Instructional emphasis is placed on phonics and reading for meaning. The program utilizes cooperative learning and encourages the use of reading workshop. Reading workshop (Atwell, 1998) emphasizes student choice in the selection of reading materials and is grounded in the belief that through discourse students will engage in meaningful dialogue about reading genre, style, authors, and the link between reading and writing. The teacher serves as facilitator, guiding students as they develop an understanding of the reading process and improve reading comprehension. Reading workshop can begin at the elementary level and continue throughout high school. Success for All is only implemented in school districts where 80% of school personnel have committed to using the program.

Prevention and immediate intervention are the two cornerstones of the reading program, with parents and tutors serving as instructional facilitators during ninety minute reading periods. Success for All has been extended to middle school, where the emphasis is on reading remediation for students who are falling behind in content classes.

Slavin, Madden, Dolan, and Waski (1994) reported that students who participated in Success for All improved their reading performance. In their study of 15 schools in seven states (Alabama, Idaho, Indiana, Maryland, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Tennessee), every Success for All school was matched with a control school similar in socioeconomic level, achievement, and diversity. All schools used the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test and the Durrell Analysis of Reading Difficulty Test to assess student achievement. Three scales of the Woodcock instrument were utilized: word identification, word attack, and passage comprehension. The Durrell instrument was used to measure students’ read-aloud ability and their comprehension of text.

Students enrolled in the Success for All schools, grades 1-3, performed significantly better than students in control groups at the same levels. ANCOVA using pretests as covariates were used to compare raw scores. Effect sizes for each grade were: (a) grade 1, ES = .58; (b) grade 2, ES = .61, and (c) grade 3, ES = .53 (for the three grade levels, p < .001). Effect sizes for students in the lowest quartile of their classes were significantly larger than their average counterparts: (a) grade 1, ES =
Data indicated that the longer a school consistently participated in the program, the more significant the effect size.

The SRA McGraw-Hill Direct Instruction Corrective Reading Program emphasizes phonics and has been implemented at both the elementary and secondary levels. Polloway, Epstein, Polloway, Patton, and Ball (1986) found a positive correlation between direct phonics instruction and increased comprehension. This finding was later supported by Foorman (1995). The SRA program includes specifically prescribed lessons targeted to decoding (sounding out words) and comprehension skills (understanding text) along a developmental framework for each reader. Instruction is customized to suit the learning needs of individual students and includes word patterns, sentence construction, grammar, and interpreting context clues. Students are exposed to a variety of increasingly more challenging reading materials. As they gain skills, they are able to increase fluency and make better sense of what they are reading.

Routman (1999) recommended teachers implement a variety of instructional methods for teaching reading in lieu of following a prescribed, packaged curriculum. Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, and Mueller (2001) suggested that skills-oriented commercial reading programs rarely benefit students beyond the second grade. The researchers advocated the implementation of an academic literacy course at the secondary level, structured around the Reading Apprenticeship framework which utilizes a variety of reading experiences, text structures, and word-level strategies. The focus is on expanding students' comprehension and analysis of subject-area content through collaborative inquiry. The teacher serves as coach, providing opportunities for students to collectively examine and discuss a variety of texts; at the same time, students develop an awareness of their own reading abilities or limitations. Students relate what they read to personal experience while exploring word construction, specific vocabulary, text structure, genre, and language associated with content-based reading. Questioning, summarizing, clarifying, and predicting become integral components of the reading process. Students develop a metacognitive awareness that enables them to comprehend what they have read and to pinpoint areas of uncertainty.
Greenleaf et al. (2001) studied 216 ethnically diverse ninth grade high school students from a poor urban California neighborhood who were taught reading as a communicative process (rather than a set of isolated skills) in an academic literacy course. The purpose of the course was to expand students' ability to self-assess reading performance and to increase fluency, competency, and commitment to reading. The ultimate goal was to enable students to self-correct reading miscues and to become familiar with the types of vocabulary and sentence structure found in different types of curricular textbooks.

Pre and post tests of reading proficiency were measured using the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) assessment. The DRP, which measures a student's ability to comprehend increasingly more difficult text, is both a norm-referenced and criterion-referenced instrument. Within a seven-month period, students gained an average of four points. Mean (raw) scores from the fall to the spring administration of the DRP progressed from 43.51 (SD = 14.17) to 47.44 (SD = 13.43), p < .01. This reflected an increase in the mean percentile equivalent score in national ranking from the 47th (SD = 23.57) to the 49th (SD = 23.92) percentile (p < .05).

Eight 9th grade students were identified for further case study. The student volunteers were representative of the ethnic and gender diversity within their classrooms. Classroom observations, student reflections, pre and post course open-ended surveys, and interviews helped to define student choices, experiences and convictions about reading.

Four dimensions of internal and external meta-cognitive classroom conversations were identified during the reading literacy course. The social dimension referred to the classroom climate, defined in terms of respect for differences in opinion, ethnicity, and personal preference of reading genre. The personal dimension alluded to the students' individual identities as emerging readers--their fluency, purposes for reading, and skill improvement with a variety of text. The cognitive dimension centered on developing comprehension skills using instructional strategies such as rereading, questioning, restating, or summarizing. Finally, the knowledge-building dimension focused on the use of prior experience and the use of text constructs to extend word meaning and to gain knowledge about social discourse situated within text (Greenleaf et al., 2001.) The
four dimensions represent constructs for understanding written passages. Students discuss what they have read, self-assess for understanding and purpose, and apply personal experience as it applies to the content.

Findings suggested that the Reading Apprenticeship increased students’ reading comprehension and motivation to read. Reading for purpose was viewed as an integral part of the curriculum, and reciprocal teaching by students was deemed a strong instructional component.

Application of Findings to the Study

Many concepts from the reading programs were integrated into the reading improvement class. For example, Slavin (1996) recommended ninety minute reading periods; the class met for ninety minutes every other day. Braunger and Lewis (1997) suggested students improve reading skills simply by reading; students in the experimental class participated in read alouds and independent reading each session. Thirty minutes of nightly reading were assigned. Collaboration and dialogue were discussed several times in connection with reading programs (Applebee, 1994; Fuchs, Fuchs, & Thompson, 2001; Rex, 2001; Slavin, 1996). Both were integral components of the reading class. Students responded to readings orally and in writing. Discussing responses to questioning and writing prompts connected to class readings were ongoing.

The use of guided reading is an essential element of any reading program designed to improve comprehension skills (Beers, 2003; Burns, 2001; Richardson & Morgan, 1994). This was the case with the reading class. The teacher assisted students in collecting and analyzing information around main ideas found in text. Brainstorming, predicting, rereading, clarifying, accessing prior knowledge, scanning, and restating were all used to assist students with reading comprehension.

Instructional Strategies in Reading

A plethora of instructional strategies for improving basic skills and comprehension in reading appear in the literature. Findings are presented in these two arenas.
Basic Skills

Reading comprehension does not exist in a vacuum. Alphabetic recognition, decoding, sentence structure, vocabulary, phonemic awareness, and word recognition are prerequisite skills to understanding text. Although phonemic awareness and rapid naming are normally associated with emerging readers, they also characterize problems associated with struggling adolescent readers (Allor, 2002). Orthographic deficiencies related to an unclear understanding of how sound is represented by letters also inhibit successful reading acquisition at the secondary level (Compton, 2002). These basic skills are necessary for the development of fluency and to increase comprehension.

In a longitudinal study, Langer (2001) found that the ability to effectively and efficiently read words had a direct effect on a student's ability to comprehend content. The Langer study took place over a five-year period in California, Florida, Texas, and New York. Twenty-five middle and high schools were selected for inclusion in the study based on their diverse populations, educational challenges, and goals for improvement. Langer wanted to know why minority students from poor socio-economic backgrounds in some schools scored better on standardized reading and writing achievement tests than others with similar demographics. The researcher conducted interviews and classroom observations at each school for five weeks each year for a period of two years, focusing on curriculum and instructional strategies. Data were analyzed using cross-case analysis, where emerging commonalities were tested both within and across cases. Three contexts were considered: (a) instructional program, (b) the teacher, and (c) the students. Coding emerged according to the environment (classroom, professional venue, or social interaction) and behavior (professional knowledge, pedagogical process, or skills). A constant comparison analysis to identify patterns was conducted. All data were triangulated through observations, interviews, shadowing teachers, field notes, recorded emails, telephone contacts, and classroom artifacts.

Langer revealed three approaches to skill development: (a) separated instruction in which specific rules or conventions of language are taught, (b) simulated instruction wherein targeted rules or conventions are applied to achieve understanding, and (c) integrated instruction in which students apply rules or conventions within the embedded context of learning. The researchers reported that a combination of sub skills lead to
mastery of more complex reading tasks. Students with strong decoding, phonemic, and vocabulary skills were able to apply basic reading skills and understand meaning as they progressed through text. Langer recommended that teachers use test data to inform instruction and to create opportunities for students to make connections across content areas in a collaborative environment.

McCormick and Becker (1996) examined two instructional factors related to basic reading skills--word recognition (recognizing words at sight) and word identification (using strategies to identify unknown words). Their analysis of studies conducted by numerous researchers over fifteen years provided a comprehensive summary of strategies directly related to both. The findings suggested that immediate corrective feedback using modeling or letter/sound guidance is appropriate on all reading miscues. Teachers should offer the correct pronunciation at the time of the error, including phonetic patterning. Previewing text via listening or silent reading aided in subsequent word recognition as did written and verbal practice with initial word learning. The more students read, the more familiar they become with word structure, usage, and recognition.

Word identification is a more abstract skill, requiring an understanding of grapheme/phoneme relationships (McCormick & Becker, 1996). Instructional strategies are specifically linked to phonics immersion, reinforcing spelling and pronunciation skills through phonics analysis and direct blending of sounds. Students must "see, hear, speak, and write words to acquire adequate word identification skills so that comprehension becomes an automatic process" (McCormick & Becker, 1996.) Only then can students critically examine content and apply meta-cognitive analysis to achieve meaning. This becomes a significant factor as youngsters enter secondary school and are faced with the dilemma of understanding expository text.

Basic skill development can be taught (McCormick & Becker, 1996.) Key to successful instruction is a skilled and knowledgeable teacher who monitors student achievement and adjusts instruction linked to ongoing assessment (Brabham & Villaume, 2003). Although systematic and explicit phonics instruction does not extend the comprehension skills of high school students, these readers do benefit from other basic skills instruction anchored in fluency and vocabulary development.
Comprehension Skills

Reading is a complex process requiring the acquisition of fundamental skills to build comprehension. Strategies to strengthen such skills vary depending upon the different reading levels and learning styles of individual students. Often, secondary teachers do not plan collaboratively or embrace a coordinated instructional effort to design lesson plans that include teaching comprehension strategies. Lack of coordinated effort and lack of time are critical factors in successfully implementing reading strategies, but fully implemented, such strategies can increase the reading comprehension of students.

In a study of 111 secondary students enrolled in six urban high schools located in the southeastern United States, Saenz and Fuchs (2002) found that students comprehended less information from expository than narrative text and were also less fluent with expository text. Four factors contributed to the deficiencies: (a) text structure, (b) unfamiliar concepts and ideas, (c) content vocabulary, and (d) prior knowledge. Although the study focused on secondary students with learning disabilities, such factors also affected regular education students who struggled with reading comprehension. Students were assessed on text from four narrative passages and four expository passages. Results using a one-way ANOVA indicated that students read a larger number of words correctly on narrative than expository text $F(1, 110) = 30.82, p < .001$, ES = .21. The means for words read correctly within a 2-minute period on narrative and expository text, respectively, were 223.16 (SD = 70.75) and 212.62 (SD = 67.48), indicating the students had more difficulty with expository passages. The researchers conducted t-tests on the effect of expository versus narrative text type on inferential questioning. A statistically significant effect was found, $t(110) = 4.58, p < .001$, ES = .42, indicating students had less difficulty with inferential questioning of narrative text. The mean of questions answered correctly on narrative passages was 48.20 (SD = 29.91); the mean of questions answered correctly on expository passages was 33.11 (SD = 23.40).

Comprehension involves numerous avenues to understanding text. Collins and Collins (2002) identified six avenues for understanding text: (a) connecting text to prior knowledge, (b) determining key components, (c) generating questions, (d) developing
inferences, (e) synthesizing new ideas, (f) applying knowledge, (g) evaluating text and monitoring comprehension while reading. Such avenues must be taught. Richardson and Morgan (1994) contended that it was the teacher's responsibility to teach students about comprehension and the organization of text. Burns (2001) added that when students read with purpose, they are able to organize meaning from text.

There is ample evidence to suggest that competent readers employ a multitude of strategies to interpret text (Pressley, 1997). Such skills do not occur in isolation, but require direct instruction and specific modeling of comprehension strategies. Students acquire effective reading and comprehension strategies through teacher modeling and explanation within the context of reading. Using a variety of text, in conjunction with verbal and written analysis, reinforces comprehension. Guthrie et al. (1995) suggested that encouraging social interaction through debate and discussion increased the amount of reading and thinking by students in relation to instructional texts.

Competent strategic readers are able to make sense of text by applying strategies throughout the reading process. The teacher serves as a coach, encouraging students to interact with text and to think aloud. A problem lies with adolescents who have developed negative attitudes towards reading and subsequently experience failure in school. Often these students become distracted, angry, or depressed. Many can read words but lack understanding of what they have read. Strategies taught out of context or without practice have no application value. Students lack confidence and feel disenfranchised. Harmon (2002) found that struggling high school readers were unable to apply strategic reading skills during independent reading and had limited vocabulary. She recommended the use of facilitated peer dialogue and direct instruction of word learning strategies. Harmon stressed the importance of meaningful discussion in developing a context for word learning.

Ivey (1999) determined that the reading performance of middle school youngsters was dependent upon the pedagogical environment in which reading occurred. In a qualitative study, Ivey examined the reading performance of three sixth grade students in a middle school located in the southeastern United States. Selection of the subjects occurred after approximately 20 hours of classroom observation, and
was based on two criteria: (a) the willingness and ability of students to self-analyze their reading, and (b) level of reading ability.

Data collection included observations and field notes during a variety of instructional settings over a five-month period, interviews with the three subjects, and one-on-one shared reading experiences. Three phases of data analysis were pursued. Phase 1 focused on identifying patterns of reading behavior. Phase 2 centered on coding patterns based on the number and frequency of similar behaviors. Phase 3 involved organizing patterns with similar properties into clusters. Data that could not be triangulated were eliminated.

Results indicated that students preferred meaningful literacy engagement, personal choice, and a purposeful, interdisciplinary approach. Results of the Ivey study revealed that reading programs should be student-centered and constructivist in design. Students should be given choices in what they read and how they respond in a learning environment that values personal experience. When possible, objectives from different content areas should be integrated. For example, if the instructional focus in a history class is World War II, students could read *Night*, a story of the Holocaust, in their English class. Similarly, they could study the artwork of Mark Strauss, a holocaust survivor, or take a visual tour of the Holocaust Museum on the internet. Students could demonstrate their mastery of content through performance-based evaluation rather than a traditional paper and pencil examination. Reading in the various content areas would be the continuous thread that connects the interdisciplinary fabric of study. It should be noted that due to the nature of the case study, results were not generalizeable to a larger population.

The use of student choice and ongoing dialogue between teacher and students is supported by the research of Vygotsky and the Zone of Proximal Development in which students move from dependent to independent learners (Van Der Veer & Valsiner, 1994). Teachers should teach specific reading strategies that enable learners to overcome reading obstacles and to become independent readers who are able to construct meaning from words. The goal is for readers to move from reading with adult assistance to reading independently and with understanding,
The findings of Ivey (1999) were similar to those in a study involving adult literacy practices. Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, and Soler (2002) reported that adult readers preferred authentic reading experiences that served real-life purposes, such as understanding financial forms, interpreting VCR programming guides, or comprehending product warranties. The unfamiliar language in these documents is similar to the expository text found in school books. The authors utilized teacher questionnaires, class observation instruments, and student interviews from 83 adult literacy classes in 22 states. Utilizing snowball sampling, 159 participants were identified, ranging in age from 18-68 with varying literacy abilities, from pre-literacy to reading at the 11th grade.

Two dimensions of interest drove the study: teacher-student collaboration and authenticity of class requirements. Triangulation of data gleaned from the three instruments represented perspectives of teacher, student, and observer. Findings revealed that collaboration, time in the literacy program, and shared dialogue were strong components of the adult literacy model. Participants who were able to discuss their reading and those who stayed with the program over time benefited the most. Personal choice was key. In a hierarchical linear model (HLM), authenticity of class assignments contributed significantly to change in literacy practices ($\beta = .16$, $p < .01$). There was no significant correlation between collaboration of teacher and student and change in literacy practices, ($\beta = -0.34$, $p < .01$.)

Pressley (1997) identified five strategies, similar to the findings of Collins and Collins (2002), that serve as a basis for effective reading comprehension instruction: (a) accessing prior knowledge, (b) questioning, (c) seeking clarification, (d) mental imagery, (e) making connections to text, and (f) summarizing. Such strategies clearly require student participation and teacher guidance. Guthrie et al. (1995) suggested that comprehension strategies, when effectively implemented, empower students with the confidence to expand the frequency and level of their reading.

Another cognitive strategy that appears often in the literature (Lloyd, 1996; Padak, Rasinski, & Mraz, 2002; Pressley, 2001) is concept mapping--organizing reading structures into a graphic display or constructing mental images of text. Teachers utilize
a variety of mapping strategies with their students to examine content in depth while challenging them to collaborate, read, and write. Students construct knowledge from exploring the various components of an issue. Teachers serve as guides, assisting students as they develop a sense of what they are reading, extending their capacity for making connections to learning, and organizing thought.

Crucial to any effective reading program is ongoing evaluation. Carbo (1997) identified four indicators of effectiveness: (a) student interest, (b) fluency development, (c) time, and (d) increasing comprehension levels through questioning, discussion, mapping, and other related strategies. An effective reading program must embrace the individual needs of its readers and provide modeling of correct reading methods. Beers (2003) cautioned teachers to separate effective from ineffective reading strategies and proceed with instruction that meets the individual needs of learners.

Motivation to read is directly related to good grades. Unfortunately, as students progress through elementary school, the motivation to read declines dramatically (Pressley, 2001). Students who are less successful associate poor academic performance with a lack of ability. In many cases, it is simply a lack of effort borne of frustration. Teachers can dispel this myth by providing instructional strategies that promote comprehension and purposeful reading.

When students can understand and apply content, they can academically achieve. Saenz and Fuchs (2002) recognized the difficulty in understanding expository text. They and others (Collins & Collins, 2002; Pressley, 1997) suggested that reading comprehension was tied to understanding key concepts through the use of prior knowledge, making predictions, defining unfamiliar vocabulary, studying text structure and making inferences. Such skills must be the result of direct instruction (Harmon, 2002; Pressley, 1997; Richardson & Morgan, 1994). Reading for purpose (Burns, 2001; Ivey, 1999; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002) is essential. The reading improvement class is designed with these concepts in mind.

Application of Findings to the Study

Students in the class were trained to identify roadblocks in their reading and to apply specific strategies to improve their comprehension. They read a variety of
material, including poems, textbooks, essays, library books, newspapers, and folktales. They used background knowledge to help them understand new topics or concepts. Guided reading was ongoing. Students worked independently, in pairs, and in groups to dissect text and improve vocabulary. A variety of content textbooks and the elements therein were examined through text walks. Students were given class time each session to read content texts. The teacher trained students to predict and read for purpose, connect with the text, to pause and reflect, to reread, and summarize. Graphic organizers were used to assist students to map concepts or ideas based on their reading. Students maintained portfolios and discussed their reading with class members. They also made bi-monthly trips to the school library. The students were taught to identify main ideas and key terms within text.

Research Designs in the Literature

The research designs found in the literature review were both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Five studies (Ivey, 1999; Langer, 2001; Morris et al., 1996, Purcell-Gates et al., 2002, and Rex, 2001) were of a qualitative design, utilizing interviews, audio taping, field notes, artifacts, and observations for data collection. Four studies (Fuchs et al., 1999; Paul et al., 1996; Saenz & Fuchs, 2002, and Slaven, 1996) were quantitative designs, utilizing data from pre and post tests, surveys, and Likert scales. The two remaining studies (Greenleaf et al., 2001 and Richards, 2001) used a combination of both. Subjects in all studies included students and teachers. The focus of the studies centered on one main topic: instruction in reading. The purpose of the studies was to examine instructional strategies and programs that promoted reading comprehension. Sample size of quantitative designs was characteristically larger than sample size for qualitative studies.

There were aspects of both designs that I found appropriate for this study. Interviewing students of the reading improvement class provided insight about their learning experiences. I wanted to know how they self-assessed their reading skills and how they defined effective teachers. I wanted to know their reaction to being involved in a reading improvement class in a high school setting. I was eager to learn how these students defined academic success. An interview with the teacher provided insight into
her journey in working with challenging ninth graders who had already experienced failure at the secondary level. Classroom observations enabled me to witness the interactions between the teacher and her students and among the students themselves. Portfolios provided a visual record of reading activities and student performance over time. Descriptive data revealed aspects of the reading phenomena from both the teacher and student perspective, in a socially constructed environment (the reading improvement classroom). Throughout the year, I collected, analyzed, and coded data about this reading improvement initiative at the high school level.

Quantitative data from pre and post tests compared the reading performance of students within the study against a control group. Other outcome variables included a comparison of attendance, discipline, and academic performance data for both groups between the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years.

Critique of the Literature

I found little empirical research in reading at the secondary level. Although NCLB mandated effective reading instruction for primary students, nothing has been specifically mandated for improving the reading skills of high school students who struggle due to a deficiency in basic reading skills, a deficiency in comprehension skills, or low motivation. Such factors appear to be interrelated. In addition, limited research exists in the use of instructional technology with reading intervention programs (Padak et al., 2002). Although elementary students have had positive results with Accelerated Reader, the same is not true for secondary students. How will high school students be able to make adequate yearly progress if they continue to lack effective reading and comprehension skills? What instructional strategies will work best for these older students?

I found much in the literature about reading comprehension and basic skills, particularly at the elementary level. There was consistency on the topic of instructional strategies and agreement by researchers that reading difficulty increases as students advance in school.

Researchers agreed that the expository language found in curricular textbooks was particularly challenging for secondary students. Unfortunately, a pervasive neglect
of teaching comprehension and reading to learn across curricular areas at the high school level prevails, and a lack of research on reading improvement of regular education students in high school exists. Irwin (2002) recommended the implementation of evidence-based instruction, in which teachers implement diverse teaching strategies to promote student achievement in classrooms with a wide variety of individual learning needs and interests.

Unfortunately, a lack of motivation to increase student achievement at the high school level through improved reading is epidemic. Over the past five years in my role as an instructional leader at the secondary level, I have repeatedly been met with resistance by classroom teachers who simply wish to teach their content--not "reading." Lloyd (1996) found limited connection between reading research and pedagogy. It is this gap between research-based instructional reading strategies and student performance at the secondary level that I addressed with the current study.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

Three questions guided the research. First, how does enrollment in a reading improvement course affect the reading comprehension, vocabulary, and scanning abilities of regular education struggling ninth grader readers as measured by pre and post tests? Secondly, how does enrollment in a reading improvement course affect attendance, problematic behavior, and academic performance of struggling ninth grade readers? Finally, how does enrollment in a reading course affect school experience as perceived by ninth grade participants?

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a reading class on regular high school students who struggle academically. Students enrolled in the class were given direct instruction in reading, with emphasis on building comprehension skills. The intent was to provide insight for principals who wish to establish instructional programs for regular education high school students who struggle with reading and do not make adequate yearly progress. What follows is a description of the research design and methodology, preceded by a discussion about the school in which the study was conducted.

Study Setting

Meadow Park High School (not the real name) opened its doors in August 1999 with an enrollment of 1320 students. Now in its fifth year of operation, the current membership is 2515. Approximately 25% of the students are African-American; 13% are Latino; 5% are Asian/Pacific Islander, and the remainder is Caucasian. The mobility rate is 14.6%. The school is located approximately 30 miles from the District of Columbia and is in close proximity to two military installations.

Meadow Park High School houses a specialty program dedicated to information technology (IT). There are 1150 computers in the building and 13 computer labs.
Twenty-four percent of the students participate in the IT program. Other programs include special education (11%), learners of English language (6%), gifted education (11%), vocational education (65%), and work study (1%). Students on free or reduced-price lunch account for 23% of the student population.

Population and Sample

Regular education high school students who struggle with reading comprehension were the focus of this study. A population of rising 9th grade students who had failed at least two exams during the spring 2003 administration of the 8th grade Virginia Standards of Learning assessments was identified. A simple random sample of forty ninth grade students from the population was selected for inclusion by utilizing a random numbers chart. Twenty of the students were assigned to a daily reading comprehension class (treatment group). A second group of twenty served as the control, or comparison, group.

Research Design

A mixed methods research design was used for the study. An experimental design with qualitative elements was implemented. A discussion of the dual approach follows.

Experimental Design

The first design component for this study was experimental in nature. Pre and post test measurements were used to determine program outcomes. Campbell and Stanley (1963) recommended the use of a control group when measuring the effects of a treatment:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
R \ O \times \ O \\
R \ O \ O
\end{array}
\]

A threat to internal validity may have existed due to other effects not related to the treatment that could contribute to differences in performance between pre and post tests. To ameliorate the threat, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was employed to test for the difference between the experimental and control group using ten dependent variables: (a) 2004 attendance, (b) number of discipline referrals in 2004, (c) SDRT post
test results measuring scanning, vocabulary, and comprehension, (d) 2004 academic achievement in English, world history, science, and math, and (e) 2004 scores on the VA Science Standards of Learning exam. Table 2 is a summary of the ANCOVA design. It should be noted that the two groups (those receiving reading instruction and those not receiving reading instruction) were comparable in that they were regular education students who were randomly selected from a population of ninth graders who failed at least two state standards assessments in the eighth grade. Due to the small number of students in both the control and treatment groups, generalization should be done with caution.

Qualitative Design

The qualitative design for the study was descriptive in nature. Data gathered from interviews, classroom observations, and anecdotal records may lead to a theory about
reading instruction at the secondary level. Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined grounded theory in terms of concepts or relationships that emerge from data that provide new understandings about a phenomenon. The study included the experiences of the students within the organizational construct of an experimental reading program. Field notes of classroom observations were collected by the researcher. Structured interviews with students enrolled in the reading class were conducted. Some data reflected the students' experiences in both the class and the school in general. These data served as contextual elements within the study.

The reading teacher was a key informant. Richards (2001) stressed the importance of teachers' professional judgment in developing authentic reading programs. Under the auspices of NCLB, the key informant is defined as a "highly qualified" teacher. She has taught English for 18 years, earning a Master's degree in 1999 from a local state university. In addition to her teaching position, she has served as a reading strategies consultant to Spotsylvania County Public Schools in Virginia. She has presented workshops on the integration of reading and writing in the secondary classroom at sessions of the Virginia Middle School Conference and presented workshops on the reading process and the standards of learning at sessions of the Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development Conference.

Specification of Treatment

Twenty students enrolled in the reading course met every other day for approximately 90 minutes. Four objectives of the reading course were established: (a) to provide explicit instruction in word recognition, fluency, comprehension, and inference; (b) to equip struggling students with a tool box of reading strategies; (c) to familiarize students with expository text, especially in the content areas of English, social studies, and science, and (d) to create independent readers. Specific topics of study are listed in Appendix C. Students maintained reading logs and portfolios, and participated in daily read-alouds. Time was allotted each session to reading and discussing content material from core academic subjects. To encourage independent reading, class time was devoted every two weeks to visiting the school library. Students were required to check out books and write reflections about them.
The second twenty randomly-selected students were assigned to the control group. The control group did not receive reading instruction and served as the comparison group. Students in both groups were enrolled in the same number of classes, including English 9, world history, science, mathematics, and two electives. One elective of the experimental group was the reading class. Students in the control group selected from two of the following elective courses: art, band, choir, word processing, technical drawing, journalism, foreign language (Spanish, Latin, French, or German), physical education, or drama.

Data Collection

Data collection began in September 2003 and continued until May 2004. There were two primary research instruments utilized. The first was a quantitative measure; the second, an interview protocol. Students were administered the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, Form J (Karlsen & Gardner, 1996) in November 2003 and the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test, Form K in May 2004. Attendance, discipline, and achievement records of both the treatment and control groups from the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years were collected and analyzed.

Classroom observations, examination of teacher records and student portfolios, along with interviews of the students and teacher were combined to create different levels of data collection. There were three formal observations throughout the year, beginning in September and continuing until May. Observations were recorded as dated field notes and included descriptions of pedagogical practice, teacher-student interaction, student-student interaction, and classroom demographics (the gender and ethnicity of students present). These fragmented data served as contextual elements to the study.

Classroom artifacts included teacher records (grades, attendance, and recorded dialogue) and student portfolios. These data were the measure by which phenomena about reading instruction in the high school were identified and coded. As new phenomena emerged, they were compared to earlier findings, leading to an understanding about what happens to regular education ninth graders who are enrolled in a reading improvement class.
Instruments for Measuring Effects

A hybrid research design necessitated different forms of instruments for measuring effects. The experimental design utilized pre and post tests and student records that contained grades, VA SOL scores in science, attendance, and disciplinary data; the qualitative design utilized interviews and portfolios.

Pre and Post Tests

Students in both the experimental and control groups were administered pre and post tests using Form J and K of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT), Fourth Edition, grades 9-12. The SDRT-4 is a diagnostic instrument organized around four main components of the reading process--phonetic analysis, vocabulary, comprehension, and scanning. There are six reading levels of testing: (a) red level--grades 1.5-2.5; (b) orange level--grades 2.5-3.5; (c) green level--grades 3.5-4.5; (d) purple level--grades 4.5-6.5; (e) brown level--grades 6.5-8.9, and (f) blue level--grades 9.0-12.9. Testing data from the purple, brown, and blue levels is concentrated in three main domains of reading instruction: comprehension, vocabulary, and scanning for information. The SDRT-4 is designed to provide detailed information about the specific reading skills of low-achieving students. Its primary purpose is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of those readers; hence, test items are easier than those found in general achievement tests. Test data provide both norm-referenced and criterion-referenced information about student performance. The norm-referenced scores are based on test data collected during the fall of 1994 and spring of 1995 from approximately 52,000 students, and were representative of the national school population. Norm-referenced scores are presented as scaled scores, percentile ranks, stanines, normal curve equivalents (NCE), and grade equivalents. The criterion-referenced scores and progress indicator scores, which appear as cut scores, identify reading proficiency in specific domains. For the purpose of this study, normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores were used for data analysis.

The subtests, objectives, and number of items of the SDRT, Fourth Edition, are summarized in a table developed by Harcourt Brace Educational Measurement (1996) and appear in Table 3. Each subtest requires an exact time limit for administration.
Deviation from the time parameters invalidates the test. The comprehension component requires 50 minutes of testing time, vocabulary requires 20 minutes, and scanning requires 15 minutes (blue level). There are 10 additional minutes of preparation time for each component.

**Interviews**

An interview protocol (Appendix A) was used to structure interviews with students enrolled in the reading intervention class. Three domains were investigated: (a) reading instruction, (b) knowledge of reading strategies, and (c) self-assessment of reading ability. Face and construct validity was achieved using a staff survey (see Appendix B).

**Validity**

Reviewers described the SDRT as a useful tool for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of readers and for determining the effectiveness of instructional reading programs (Buros, 1996). Items on the instrument mirror state and national reading curricula and educational trends identified by the International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English. An expert panel of nine minority educators reviewed each item on the SDRT-4 and deleted or revised any items that denoted a cultural, gender, socio-economic, ethnic or regional bias. Additional bias was eliminated following a national administration of the instrument in 1990, in which statistical analysis revealed differences among gender and ethnicity groups.

To ensure validity of qualitative findings, triangulation of data through multiple methods was employed. The teacher, who acted as key informant, served as a participant observer. Classroom observations, examination of teacher records and student portfolios, along with interviews of the students and teacher combined to create different levels of data for analysis. These data were the measure by which phenomena about reading instruction in the high school were identified and coded. As new phenomena emerged, they, too, were coded and compared to earlier findings.
Table 3

Subtests and Numbers of Items of SDRT, Fourth Edition

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<th>Subtests</th>
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<th>Level 3.5-4.5</th>
<th>Level 4.5-6.5</th>
<th>Level 6.5-8.9</th>
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</table>

Trial administration of the interview protocol (see Appendix B) was conducted in April 2004 to ensure face and construct validity of items. Cohen and Manion (1989) reported that in the field of education, methodological triangulation is the most illuminating and frequently used.

I was not free of bias. I presumed that any reading instruction was better than no reading instruction. I also became aware of my own cultural bias about reading. I believed that students who were raised in homes where education and reading were valued would be better readers than their counterparts who came from homes where earning a paycheck was more valued. Simply stated, I believed the lower the socio-economic backgrounds of students the greater the need for reading remediation. The key was to filter that bias from the data analysis and to be open to varying perspectives on that theme.

Reliability

Reviewers of the SDRT-4 have determined that all items related to the constructs on the SDRT-4 have internal consistency reliability. The KR20 coefficients (Form J) ranged from .79 to .94 for the four subtest areas and .95 to .98 for total scores. The alternate-form (K) reliability KR20 coefficients for the subtest areas range from .62 to .82, and they range from .86 to .88 for total scores. A coefficient of +.5 indicates at least some degree of reliability. Subtest areas are uni-dimensional measured along a continuum.

Scoring

Each administration of the SDRT-4 (Fall 2003 and Spring 2004) was sent to the Stanford Testing Service for scoring. The results, in conjunction with other data, were used to analyze the effectiveness of the reading class. Content-referenced scores were used to measure student performance on specific test questions related to vocabulary, comprehension, and scanning. Progress indicator scores (cutoff scores) were used to identify students who achieved competency in these three areas of reading. For the purpose of this study, normal curve equivalent (NCE) scores were used for data analysis.
Analysis

Analysis varied due to the mixed methods research design. Statistical analysis of pre and post test results, in combination with attendance, discipline and achievement data were supplemented with descriptive data, collected through interviews and portfolios.

Quantitative Data Analysis

To determine the effects of the reading instruction, students in both the experimental and control groups were administered pre and post tests using Form J and K of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT), 4th Edition, grades 9-12. Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) tested for the difference between the experimental and control groups using pre and post test scores of the SDRT and attendance, discipline, and academic achievement data from the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years (see Table 2). It should be noted that the two groups (those receiving reading instruction and those that do not) were comparable in that they were regular education students who were randomly selected from a sample of ninth graders who failed at least two state standards assessments in the eighth grade.

Qualitative Data Analysis

While pre and post test measurements of the SDRT, attendance, discipline, and achievement data were used to measure program outcomes, the experiences of the students and the teacher in the reading improvement class were also explored. Data gathered from interviews, classroom observations, and anecdotal records increased my understanding about reading instruction at the secondary level. Data analysis was simultaneous with data collection (Merriam, 2002).

Analysis of data revealed properties similar in nature that were coded as emerging concepts. These included student knowledge of specific reading strategies, inconsistent application of reading strategies in core content areas, use of reading strategies by content teachers, and ability of students to self-analyze their own reading strengths and weaknesses. A comparative analysis among concepts was ongoing. A record of specific dates, participants, and settings were maintained during data collection. To expedite analysis, data were entered into Microsoft Access. At the same
time, data fragments I deemed significant were labeled and compared to other fragments, thus affirming or creating new concepts or subcategories.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of a reading improvement class for regular education ninth grade students who struggled academically in English, mathematics, science, and world history and failed to make adequate yearly progress based on the Virginia Standards of Learning test in science. There were 32 participants (N =15 for the control group; N =17 for students in the reading class) in the study. Twenty subjects were initially enrolled in both the control and reading classes; however, changes in class schedules and students disenrolling from the school affected the total The demographics of subjects in both groups are in Tables 4 and 5.

A pre and post test of the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test (SDRT), Fourth Edition, was administered to students in the reading class and in the control group. Attendance, discipline, and achievement data were collected for both groups during the years 2002-2003 and 2003-2004. The following is a summary of the quantitative results.

Data Analysis of Quantitative Measures

Ten analyses of covariance (ANCOVA) were calculated with the following dependent variables: SDRT scores for comprehension, vocabulary, and scanning; attendance; number of discipline referrals; grade point averages on a 4-point scale in English, math, science, world history; and science SOL scores. Covariates used were parallel measures from the previous academic year. The variables were entered into the Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and analyzed with descriptive statistics and analysis of co-variance. The level of significance was α < .05. Tables 6-15 are summaries of the analyses of covariance. Table 16 contains the descriptive statistics for covariate and dependent variables by treatment and control group.
Table 4

Demographics of Reading Intervention Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age</th>
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<tbody>
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<tr>
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### Table 5

**Demographics of Control Group**

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The quantitative results of this study were mixed. There was no statistically significant difference between students enrolled in the reading intervention class compared to those in the control group on academic performance, attendance, or behavior. Differences between treatment and control groups were found for scanning $F(1, 29) = 11.21, p = .00$ and vocabulary $F(1, 29) = 5.96, p = .02$. The mean progress
indicator score on the scanning post test for the treatment group (reading class) was 54.00; for the control it was 38.00. The mean progress indicator score on the vocabulary post test for the treatment group (reading class) was 41.73; for the control it was 36.91 (see Table 17).

In examining regression lines for collinearity, the interaction for scanning was not significant, $F(1, 29) = 0.09, p > .05$. Similarly, the interaction for vocabulary was not significant, $F(1, 29) = 0.36, p > .05$. The slope in the treatment group was not significantly different from the slope in the control group for scanning and vocabulary.

**Analysis of Qualitative Data**

A constant comparative method of analysis was conducted. Analysis was simultaneous with data collection (Merriam, 2002). Data were collected as field notes during three ninety-minute observations of the first, second, and third nine-week grading quarters and from interviews throughout the 2003-2004 school year. Participants in the reading class were invited to participate in audio taped interviews, which are documented as codes in this document. In addition to the teacher, eleven chose to participate -- six males and five females. The interviews were semi-structured and focused on three domains: (a) reading instruction, (b) knowledge of reading strategies, and (c) self-assessment of reading ability. Verbal exchanges among the students and teacher and other observations within the classroom setting were recorded as field notes during observations on December 1, 2003, March 9, 2004, and May 10, 2004. In addition, classroom portfolios consisting of class assignments, homework, artwork, and reflective entries were collected and analyzed, along with attendance, discipline, and academic achievement data.
Table 6

*Analysis of Covariance Between Subjects in Reading Treatment and Control Groups:*

*Dependent Variable – Comprehension*

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**Analysis of Covariance Between Subjects in Reading Treatment and Control Groups:**

*Dependent Variable – Vocabulary*

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Analysis of Covariance Between Subjects in Reading Treatment and Control Groups:

Dependent Variable – Scanning

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Analysis of Covariance Between Subjects in Reading Treatment and Control Groups:

Dependent Variable – Attendance

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**Analysis of Covariance Between Subjects in Reading Treatment and Control Groups:**

*Dependent Variable – Discipline Referrals*

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Analysis of Covariance Between Subjects in Reading Treatment and Control Groups:
Dependent Variable – English Achievement

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Analysis of Covariance Between Subjects in Reading Treatment and Control Groups:

Dependent Variable – Mathematics Achievement

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Analysis of Covariance Between Subjects in Reading Treatment and Control Groups:

Dependent Variable – Science Achievement

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*Analysis of Covariance Between Subjects in Reading Treatment and Control Groups:*

*Dependent Variable – World History Achievement*

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Table 16

**Descriptive Statistics for Covariate and Dependent Variables by Treatment and Control Groups**

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<td>Math achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002-2003 (covariate)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.68</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002-2003 (covariate)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.90</td>
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<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.57</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002-2003 (covariate)</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>.84</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003-2004</td>
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<td>21.10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>381.80</td>
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* Adjusted Science marginal means
Analysis of data revealed properties similar in nature that were coded as emerging concepts. These included student knowledge of specific reading strategies, inconsistent application of reading strategies in core content areas, use of reading strategies by content teachers, and ability of students to self-analyze their own reading strengths and weaknesses. A comparative analysis among concepts was ongoing. A record of specific dates, participants, and settings were maintained during data collection. To expedite analysis, data were entered into Microsoft Access. At the same time, data fragments I deemed significant were labeled and compared to other fragments, thus affirming or creating new concepts or subcategories.

The reading class met on alternate days for ninety minutes. The teacher implemented the balanced literacy model (Pressley, Roehrig, Bogner, Raphael & Dolezal, 2002) during reading instruction. The first hour of each class session students participated in a read aloud, guided reading, and independent reading. The reading teacher provided direct instruction in comprehension and vocabulary skill development using a variety of text. She modeled effective reading strategies (see Appendix C), provided authentic and challenging content, and motivated her students to respond orally and in writing to what they had read. Students were also taught to self-monitor their reading.

JB provided an example of self-monitoring:

If we don’t understand something, we should read more to maybe make it more clear. If we didn’t understand it then, we should go back and reread. Reread it or if there is a certain word in there, read the rest of the sentence because it might help you determine what the word meant. (Interview data, Record 133)

The reading teacher devoted the last thirty minutes of each class to assist students with content assignments from their English, science, or world history classes. During this time, she helped individual students make sense of information found in their textbooks or in xeroxed material given to them by their other teachers. Students could work independently or in pairs, or use the computers in her classroom for completing research assignments. Towards this end, the teacher helped students to identify key words for web searches, interpret findings, and outline information.
Students were required to read thirty minutes each night and maintain a reading log, authenticated by a parent or guardian. Every two weeks the students visited the school library to check out books of their choosing. At the end of each nine-week grading period, the students would discuss their favorite books and the class as a whole would rank the top ten based on book discussions. The school librarian helped them to create a link on the school’s website where the titles and authors of their favorite books were posted, along with quotes by the students who had read them. An added feature was a picture of each student who had contributed to the website.

Intrinsic Themes within the Data

As data were gathered, implementation of the constant comparative method of analysis (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) led to the emergence of three major themes that may provide direction to administrators or other instructional leaders about reading intervention at the high school level. The first theme was: A supportive relationship between the teacher and student is essential to reading to learn curriculum content. The second theme was: Students are able to learn comprehension strategies even if they are struggling readers. The third theme was: Students do not automatically transfer the reading strategies they learn in a reading intervention class to other content areas. I will address each theme separately.

A Supportive Relationship is Essential to Reading to Learn

As noted earlier, many students enter secondary school as reluctant readers who lack effective reading strategies (Ivey, 1999). The challenge of comprehending and analyzing expository text overwhelms these students, and they begin a downward academic spiral. Allington and Cunningham (1996) identified direct instruction of reading and time to read as important pedagogical issues for struggling readers. Greenleaf et al. (2001), Guthrie et al. (1995), and Richards (2001) all expressed the need for teachers to serve as reading coaches and to implement a variety of strategies to assist with comprehending text.
Coach Verses Facilitator

The essential role of teacher as coach was repeatedly confirmed during interviews, during classroom observations, and from artifacts found in student portfolios. The reading intervention teacher described herself not as a facilitator because her students did not have the reading skills to be independent, but as a coach. She stated, “I gave them the rules of the game, I guess, so they could be successful. I broke it down into very specific steps – like the plays in a game.” This was a moment of enlightenment for me. While I understood the concept of scaffolding and moving students from dependent to independent strategic readers, I had not understood the instructional implications of coach verses facilitator. The coach provides instructional scaffolding through structured, guided, and independent practice using specific reading strategies that lead to metacognition; the facilitator provides the opportunity for students to experience literacy through multiple lenses. The difference between the two is significant when speaking about reading instruction. Facilitating reading prior to coaching is akin to placing the cart in front of the horse.

Trust

Students were drawn to teachers who established trusting relationships through a supportive and collaborative culture in their classrooms. Many of the struggling readers had become disenfranchised from learning and were seen by some teachers as unmotivated. The irony is these same students became more motivated when teachers took the time to coach and encourage them. This was illustrated by student who had been absent from school for a week and was behind in reading Romeo and Juliet.

AW found the language of the play confusing and archaic:

I was lost. I didn’t know who was who or what they were talking about. The teacher came over and helped me. She gave me study guides and told me what had happened and everything. So, I got back on track. (Interview data, Record 59)

The reading teacher described her biggest challenge as establishing trust with the students in the reading intervention class. Unlike most classes where there is a wide representation of students from different neighborhoods, ethnicities, gender, and socioeconomic status, the students in the reading intervention class all lived in the same
neighborhood, notorious for crime and drug activity. The neighborhood is a cluster of government-subsidized town homes; most are single-parent households where many of the boys in the class were considered the men of their families. All the students knew each other and knew who was fighting whom, who was dating whom, and who in the neighborhood was recently incarcerated. The teacher indicated, “I was the outsider. I had absolutely no concept of their neighborhood or how they grew up.” As a result, she devoted the first few minutes of each class to talking about issues of interest to the kids. “It was important for me to get beyond all that baggage and all their wounds…to sort of strip them down and teach them.”

At the same time, the reading teacher consistently demonstrated a willingness to help her students. Her actions spoke volumes to her kids.

In an interview with AW, he stated:

Mrs. M helps us with our work and stuff. She cares about helping us. I am trying to be a better reader because of her. (Interview data, Record 16)

Another student, RW, wrote a note to the reading teacher and placed it in her portfolio for the teacher to find. The note illustrated the student’s belief in the teacher’s commitment to support their learning:

Today, at first, I felt embarassed [sic], but I really wasn’t embarrased [sic], I was nervous. But I felt better once people made me feel welcomed. My goal is to get good grades and I am glad you said you would help us. (Portfolio data, Record N)

Many of the students in the reading class were hesitant to ask questions. This was particularly noticeable in the beginning of the school year. In an interview with AC, it was clear that the reading teacher had encouraged her students to take risks by asking questions. It was another example of building trust.

AC explained:

I really didn’t understand something and other kids didn’t either, so I asked the [reading] teacher about it. She said she was really glad I had asked the question cause she went over it for about twenty minutes. I remember the teacher said she was glad I had asked. (Interview data, Record 149)
Sensitivity

During a classroom observation on March 9, 2004, I observed the reading teacher utilize another facet of trust -- sensitivity. Students were working on a concept map. The objective was to organize research they had previously collected. Students were given free latitude in their choice of topics. The reading teacher was circulating around the room and making contact with each student. She was checking their progress, and encouraging discourse about the project they were completing. She made eye contact as they talked to her and she seemed to listen intently. A student near me (AW) looked up at her as she drew near. He looked uncomfortable. I could see his concept map was entitled “Police Action.” The teacher silently read what he had written. She smiled and said, “You’re making excellent progress. Keep going.” Before she left, she patted him on the back. He didn’t look at her, but smiled over at me. (I learned later that the map depicted his father’s involvement with gangs and drugs and five different incarcerations.) The student’s research topic was on gang violence. (See Appendix D)

The reading teacher recognized the need to respect and learn about the cultural differences of her students while teaching them about the relationship between reading comprehension and the demands of the high school curriculum. She was sensitive to their individual experiences.

Mrs. M. lamented:

I think some teachers forget that some of these kids come from such challenging backgrounds. Like the teacher who gets so upset because a kid doesn’t have a pencil. Well, you know what? It took everything he had just getting to school, just being there. Be thankful he is just sitting in his seat instead of spending time yelling at him for not having a pencil. Just hand him one and move on! (Interview data, Record RT)

The trust that developed between the reading teacher and her students was a powerful force in the reading intervention classroom. The students believed Mrs. M cared about them. They shared both personal and school-related experiences with her. For an entire school year, they laughed, worked, and struggled together; in the end, many of the students wanted to repeat the class the following year. AC stated, “I
learned a lot! I think you all should keep this class.” Struggling Readers can Learn Comprehension Strategies

Reading is the common thread that links classes at the secondary level (Alverman, 2001; Beers, 2003; Pressley, 1997; Worthy & McKool, 1996).

Student BJ expressed it this way:

I think that 90% of my work in school is basically reading, so reading well helps me understand a lot more, and I can learn a lot of new words. I think reading can make school easier because you know what you are doing, and you know what is going on in your classes. (Interview data, Record 100)

Assisting students to reach their potential through appropriate instructional scaffolding in reading is essential. While this is considered routine pedagogy at the elementary level, it is less frequent in high school where regular education teachers are considered content experts and devote most of their time to teaching “the curriculum.”

As struggling readers are given increasingly difficult text, they need assistance in breaking it down to ensure comprehension. Students in the reading intervention class were able to identify strategies that worked best for them.

This was illustrated in an interview with RW:

There’s something when someone reads it to you. It helps you to understand it better. I don’t know, sometimes the sound of the voice helps. (Interview data, Record 52)

In a different discussion, a female student demonstrated an awareness of her preference for a hands-on, interactive approach to understanding content from a textbook.

RS stated:

I like a teacher to sit down with me and we will read it together, or a teacher could read it to me, and then I will understand it better. I need the teacher to show me rather than learn it by myself. I will get lost, and the teacher will explain it to me. (Interview data, Record 31)

The Reading Process

Understanding the reading process was central to instruction in the reading intervention class. The first phase, called preparation, included pre-reading strategies, such as accessing prior knowledge, completing anticipation guides, and making predictions. Preparation came easily to the students.
The second phase, called assistance, was making connections or inferences within text. This proved to be more difficult. Students needed skills that would assist them during reading to help them understand what was going on in the text. To aid them in this endeavor, they were taught to use concepts maps and graphic organizers, to chunk the text, and summarize passages.

The last phase of the reading process was reflection. This could be troublesome for the students unless preparation and assistance through class discussion and instructional support had preceded it. Verbal reflection was always better than written.

Students were confident as they discussed strategies they had learned in the reading intervention class.

BJ explained her understanding of prediction:

Mrs. M had us write down what we thought was going to happen and the order that it was going to happen. She wanted a lot of details on what we thought was going to happen so you can go back and correct yourself if the prediction was wrong. It helps you understand a little better the book or the reading and the author and what is going on. (Interview data, Record 94)

Students in the reading intervention class were exposed to a variety of text, but the teacher most often used expository text similar to that found in science or social studies classes. She explained, “I did not spend a lot of time on fiction because that was not the problem; it was expository text that was difficult for them.”

AW described a time he utilized chunking to comprehend a science assignment:

In our reading class, we had to read this paper about polar bears and we like [sic] had to break it into little chunks and write about what we had read in the first half and then the second half until we were done with the paper. It put it into an order that we could understand. (Interview data, Record 72)

There were many examples of concept maps and other graphic organizers in student portfolios. Cognitive strategies of this kind enabled students to form visual images, to make connections, and to summarize content (Guthrie et al., 1995). The students were able to make inferences once they had visualized connections within the text.
Student RW explained:

The teacher gives us pictures, like diagrams. The diagrams are labeled and it makes things fit together. The pictures and diagrams help a lot. (Interview data, Record 44)

Reading for a Purpose

Another way the reading teacher engaged students with text was to provide them with authentic (real life) purposes for reading; hence, reading became a meaningful task. One day, for example, students were asked to complete a scavenger hunt using their health books (see Appendix E). The students were given a set of 10 arbitrary questions to answer. The purpose was to familiarize them with the similarity of parts within any textbook (glossary, table of contents, index, front cover, etc.) During another session, the class did a text walk using their social studies book. The reading teacher explained, “These students needed a way to interact with the material, to get meaning from what they were studying. In some classes, they were never given the opportunity to make those connections.”

JB provided an example of a classroom teacher helping students to make connections in an earth science class. She explained:

The [science] teacher gave us the vocabulary words and made sure we all understood them. If we didn’t, we would ask him and he would help us. He would explain it more thoroughly. One time I didn’t know a word and he explained it right down to my level and that was pretty cool. (Interview data, Record 132)

Reading to Learn in the Content Areas

When reading strategies are not replicated across curricular areas, students fail to see the validity in them. Similarly, when classroom teachers fail to assist students with making connections, the student may shutdown. In both cases, transfer of effective reading comprehension strategies becomes limited.

Student SG complained:

When I ask a question [about the history homework] and the teacher ignores me or the teacher does not answer me, it’s frustrating! I’m the type of person who will ask questions, but it doesn’t always work out. Sometimes I just give up. (Interview data, Record 176)
During the study, several reading strategies were presented by the reading teacher to the instructional staff during faculty meetings (see Appendix F). The staff members were encouraged to use the strategies in their classrooms and to report back their experiences with the strategies in small group discussions. The purpose was to reinforce the strategies students were learning in the reading intervention class and to emphasize reading to learn across content areas.

Little participation in implementing reading strategies across the curriculum ensued. It was abundantly clear that a shift in the culture of the high school regarding reading to learn was needed. Unfortunately, changing the culture of a school begins with the vision of the principal. The reading teacher stated, “I think kids who see me using a concept map in reading should also see it being used in science and social studies. There has to be consistency, but it needs to come from the top, all the way down.”

In the five years Meadow Park has been open, the principal has not prominently assumed the role of instructional leader. All school-wide issues related to instruction have been delegated to an assistant principal. These issues include disaggregating SOL and classroom data to drive instruction, teacher training, teacher evaluation of specific curriculum areas, developing the school plan, and appointment to school division committees related to instruction. During faculty meetings, it has been the same assistant principal who has led discussions or training related to instruction.

A new principal was appointed in June 2004. He has begun to assume the role of instructional leader; however, a paucity of training and working with instructional issues limits his ability to influence teacher practice. He, too, must rely on the same assistant principal. Interestingly, the vision he has established for the school is “building positive relationships.” There is clearly a friendlier atmosphere in the building, but instruction has remained essentially unchanged.

Student Transfer of Reading Strategies

Ample data suggested that students in the reading intervention class learned strategies for comprehending text. They were able to identify strategies by name and to use them effectively in the reading class. Some students indicated they used reading strategies in their other content classrooms, but quantitative outcome data did not
support this claim. There was no improvement in academic achievement from the 2002-2003 school year to 2003-2004 school year in the areas of English, mathematics, science, or world history.

Development of a Knowledge Base

The strategies most frequently identified during interviews with students in the reading class were scanning, rereading, reading with a purpose, outlining/summarizing, and asking questions. Other frequently cited strategies included reading aloud, discussion, searching for bolded or key words, and using context clues. The type and number of times specific reading strategies were identified or discussed are in Table 17.

In portfolios, graphic organizers such as concept maps, comparison charts, and webs were abundant. Unfortunately, work samples from the students indicated a continued lack of reading and writing skills (see Appendices G, H, and I).

As mentioned previously, the reading intervention teacher served as an instructional coach, providing the students with the opportunity to read and discuss multiple texts, thereby expanding their literacy experience. At the same time, she modeled reading strategies targeted to the specific needs of her students, determined through an informal reading skills inventory administered in September 2003, ongoing observations, and discussions with her students. Her goal was to create strategic readers.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading strategy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scanning/skimming</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rereading for understanding</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading for a purpose (e.g., reading to answer questions about text)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outlining and summarizing</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading bolded key words or subheadings</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussing the text</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading aloud</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making predictions</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a glossary or dictionary</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using context clues</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading the cover, title, or back of book</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restating text in your own words</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referring to pictures</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chunking the text for main ideas</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilizing concept maps or organizational charts</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting about text</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating text to real life experiences</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading with a peer</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>
During every class the teacher read aloud to her students and there were class discussions about what they had read. Students worked in groups, pairs, or autonomously. Their task was to consider not only what they had read, but also what one does in the process. Braunger and Lewis (1997) indicated, “Engagement in the reading task is key in successfully learning to read” (p. 34). These rich guided reading experiences led to many students expressing a new confidence in reading.

Said AW:

I read and then reread and scan the bold words that tell me what the section is about in the chapter or book. When you are scanning, you can look for key words and write those down. (Interview data, Record 64)

Beers (2003) suggested that struggling readers tended to ignore bold printed items in social studies and science textbooks. Clearly, the reading teacher in the intervention class recognized this problem and taught her students otherwise.

Student JB provided additional evidence:

Any information that’s in black or in bold I will write down. But if it’s just in regular type, that’s usually background information and I don’t write it. If you look back at the questions [at the end of a chapter] they usually ask you about things that are in bold. (Interview data, Record 137)

One afternoon, the reading teacher demonstrated the process of “chunking” the text. Students were issued yellow sticky notes and worked as partners to read and summarize sections of a handout on sea animals. Subsequently, each group shared their summarized segment. One group wrote, “This talks about the sounds of the sea. Like the mating calls. For animals like whales, dolphins [sic], seals, walrus, etc.”

What would have been a boring task for these struggling readers became an interactive and meaningful dialogue about text - - and the students enjoyed the departure from notebook paper to the yellow sticky squares.

Student AW shared her thoughts about the benefits of chunking:

I chunk the text, like write down things that I should remember, like main ideas. I have not done that in science. I did it in world history and it helped me to understand it better. (Interview data, Record 75)

Students often struggled with the unfamiliar vocabulary found in their science and social studies textbooks. Because reading comprehension improves with increased
vocabulary, the reading teacher emphasized strategies for constructing meaning from text.

RS utilized context clues and the use of bolded print to glean meaning from unfamiliar words:

If I don’t understand something I’ve read, I look at the pictures, like the stuff under the pictures is important. I put [write] down vocabulary words. And in the textbook on the side, they have little questions there so I try to find the answers cause it helps you to understand. The vocabulary words will either be written in cursive or highlighted or bolded. (Interview data, Record 30)

Student DB touted the benefits of using a glossary or dictionary to define unfamiliar words or words that seem important.

He was enthusiastic as he explained why he liked school a lot more now:

I will skip over a word that I don’t know and keep on reading and then come back at the end. I might look it up in the glossary or in the dictionary so I will know what it is I am missing...Reading is still not my favorite thing to do, but I understand what I read a little better. (Interview data, Record 123, 128)

As students read, they utilized prior knowledge to make sense of text. Their response to the text was expanded through constructive dialogue with others, resulting in a new level of metacognition. Students explored the ideas of others, compared those ideas with their own, and sometimes arrived at new levels of understanding. Such discourse was often influenced by the cultural experiences of the participants. At the same time, students learned to utilize text to substantiate their viewpoints. The teacher served as moderator, prompting the students to read, think, and discuss. It was her influence that led to a collaborative learning environment.

Student AC explained:

We discuss what we read. And all the kids in the class have different things to say and stuff and it is really interesting. They have a different point of view than me [sic] and the other people. It’s interesting to see what they feel about it, what I feel about it, and what the teacher feels about it. What they say is different from what I say and it makes me think more about the story or what we’re reading. It’s a different way of seeing in. (Interview data, Record 157)

Another strategy observed in the reading intervention class was paired reading. Student partners silently read *Lazy Peter and His Three-Cornered Hat*. Subsequently, one partner orally summarized the main points of the tale for the other. The listener
corrected any inaccuracies or contributed missing details or differing ideas. This exchange of clarifying and summarizing continued until both partners reached a shared level of comprehension.

In an interview with RW, she talked about the benefits of such collaboration:

If I don’t understand what it means, then I will reread it. Sometimes working with a partner helps because if you’re working by yourself you may not understand what it means, but the other person might understand and can explain it to you, or you may have different ideas of what it means. (Interview data, Record 47)

The reading intervention teacher read to the class at least once every session. In addition, students had numerous opportunities to read aloud in small groups, as partners, or during whole class instruction.

AW discussed the usefulness of reading aloud:

We take time to read aloud. That gives me time to think while other people are reading it or talking about it in class so I can understand it if I have to go back and read it for myself. It helps to hear the words out loud. Discussing it helps because there might be something I don’t understand and they [the students] could put it in a type of way that I could understand it, like a different way of saying it. (Interview data, Record 76)

The reading teacher often asked students to illustrate their cognitive reactions to text in drawings or paintings. This strategy aided students in their reading comprehension. An example of this occurred during a classroom observation in December 2003. Following a brainstorming activity in which students were to define what they knew about apartheid, they read a short story entitled It’s Quiet Now. The class read about life under apartheid, stopping occasionally to discuss passages. (This story was selected because it illustrated racism in a foreign country; 9th graders in the school division also read To Kill a Mockingbird, which depicts racism in the United States in the 1940’s.)

Following the class discussion, the teacher distributed paint, paper, and brushes. She asked the students to illustrate the concept of apartheid. One student (AW) painted a large black cloud. Under the cloud rain fell. The caption read, “Hate is an ebony cloud trying to rain down on happiness.” When asked about the lesson during the observation, the student stated, “When we talked about it, I could picture what was happening and I could sort of see it in my mind.” Another student (SC) illustrated the
concept with a dark wintry sky and wrote, “Anger is like the black ice that people slip on.” He explained to me during the class, “Talking to other kids made it easier for me to understand what I read about apartheid.”

The lesson was an excellent example of constructing meaning through socialization (Harmon, 2002; Langer, 2001; Purcell-Gates et al., 2002) The teacher had provided a rich environment for students to learn new vocabulary through reading and speaking. Students were engaged in focused conversations about the story and the meaning of apartheid. This was followed by an activity in which students were able to convey their comprehension of apartheid through imagery. Lloyd (1996) found that teachers facilitated comprehension when they encouraged readers to elaborate on their mental representations of ideas from text.” (p. 173).

Hindrances to Transfer of Reading Strategies

As I observed the students in their reading class and talked to them about what they were learning, it was clear they were acquiring reading skills, but not transferring them beyond that classroom setting. This was evident in their responses to questions during interviews and later confirmed in the quantitative outcome data.

It was ironic that students expressed enthusiasm for completing assignments from their core classes (English, mathematics, science, and world history) in the reading improvement classroom, but did not apply what they were being taught about how to comprehend that material in their curriculum classrooms. Three issues seemed to be key factors: (1) Minimal motivation due to teacher practice; (2) disillusionment due to poor comprehension of content-specific text, and (3) limited engagement with reading in the classroom. The following data provide support.

RS explained her poor motivation related to science class:

It’s just when she [the teacher] talks, she doesn’t have that enthusiasm like, “THESE ROCKS ARE GREAT!” It’s like “these rocks are great” in a dry voice. Then, I'm just out of it because it is not fun to me or I’m not interested because it’s boring. (Interview data, Record 32)

SG explained his lackluster motivation in history:
Lectures, man [sic], the teacher knows everything and the kids don’t. It makes me just want to go to sleep! It’s all so confusing and lectures are too long. You get lost cause you can’t keep up. (Interview data, Record 126)

AW explained his difficulty with understanding history homework that required reading:

Sometimes I can’t read the whole thing…it’s too much for me to read and “get.” I need for her [the teacher] to break it down and work with us. (Interview data, Record 67)

RS offered a solution to her reading comprehension difficulties:

I’m not that good at English. If I don’t understand a book, I need the teacher to show me rather than learn it by myself. I will get lost. I need to talk about what I read. Sometimes she can ask me questions to help me understand it. (Interview data, Record 22)

JB explained how limited engagement with reading hinders her understanding of the content:

If a teacher was to say, “Read this,” and the next time we met, we didn’t touch on it, and then we have a test and the material is on the test, that doesn’t help me. We need to go over it. I need to hear what other people think about the material. Hearing helps me to understand the words and remember. (Interview data, record 143)

DB shared his own limited engagement with reading from his social studies textbook:

I just read the notes that are on the sides of the text. They tell you what is primarily going on in the section and I will read the topics and subtopic [sic] lines, you know, the subheadings. Plus, I live with a world history major – that’s my step mom. So, if I don’t understand something, I just ask her and she’ll explain it. (Interview data, Record 122)

Most of the students in the reading intervention class were failing earth science. At least once a week the reading teacher spent time with the students reading science-related articles that focused on a variety of issues, including weather, animal habitats, nutrition, and the ocean. In addition, she helped students each class session with their science reading assignments. She speculated that a lack of interest in science was not the issue. Rather, they needed a connection of the content to their own lives. She stated, “They needed a way to interact with the material, to get meaning from what they
were studying. I think they would have had interest if there had just been something they could have grasped.”

This was echoed in the comments of AW:

Sometimes teachers might make us like [sic] read a couple chapters in the [science] book, but I love doing experiments. It’s cool. I like messing with stuff. I understand things better when I’m doing things, you know? (Interview data, Record 58)

Student SC also described a lack of connection to science content:

I read and try to understand, and I usually do in social studies. For science, I usually just open it [the book] and look through it, but mostly I just answer the questions at the end of the chapter. (Interview data, Record 8)
CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

With the implementation of No Child Left Behind, instructional leaders have been mandated to ensure that all students make adequate yearly progress in curriculum areas assessed with standards of learning tests. Green (1994) stressed the importance of leadership by the school principal in ensuring effective instructional programs, and Glickman et al. (1995) identified curriculum development as an integral component of educational leadership.

The purpose of this study was to develop and evaluate a reading intervention class for high school students who don’t qualify for special services, but often fall between the academic cracks due to poor reading skills. These students often struggle with understanding the expository language found in their textbooks. I wanted to provide them with an opportunity to develop stronger comprehension skills through the establishment of a reading intervention class. At the same time, I wanted to explore for myself the link between instructional leadership and student achievement.

Three questions guided the research. First, how does participation in a reading improvement class affect the reading comprehension, vocabulary, and scanning abilities of students enrolled as measured by pre and post tests? Second, does enrollment in a reading improvement class affect the attendance, problematic behavior, or academic performance of participating students? Third, how does enrollment in a reading intervention class affect the school experiences of the participants?

Summary of Comprehension, Vocabulary, and Scanning Data

Pre and post assessment data as measured by the Stanford Diagnostic Reading Test-4 indicated a statistically significant difference between students enrolled in the reading intervention class compared to those in the control group for scanning ($F(1, 29) = 11.21, p = .00$) and vocabulary ($F(1, 29) = 5.69, p = .02$). There was no statistically significant difference between the two groups in comprehension.

During interviews with students enrolled in the reading intervention class, scanning was described as an effective reading strategy. Students often associated it
with reading for a purpose. Said one, “I use scanning to go through [the text] real fast and look for the answer.” The reading teacher explained, “We spent a lot of our class time reading with a purpose and looking at context clues in text. Scanning was a way to clarify and organize details from a reading.”

Vocabulary skills were linked to glossary and dictionary use, using context clues, and restating text. The reading teacher incorporated a variety of reading strategies to enable students to self-correct reading miscues and to become familiar with the types of vocabulary and sentence structure found in most high school textbooks. The class utilized cueing systems, word study, building vocabulary, text structure, rereading, and questioning. A female student explained, “If I don’t understand a word, I would probably look in the glossary or go back to the section of the book and reread or try to get clues from the other words.”

Richardson and Morgan (1994) defined comprehension as “the active, integrated thinking that leads to a conclusion as a result of reading.” There was no difference in comprehension skills as measured by the SDRT-4 for students enrolled in the reading intervention class and those in the control group.

Although the reading teacher modeled a variety of instructional strategies to help students improve their comprehension (questioning, summarizing, outlining, chunking the text, concept mapping), they continued to struggle. In particular, they were unable to make inferences or connections within text; hence, she devoted a majority of instructional time to “during reading” activities.

The reading teacher indicated that poor comprehension skills became engrained when the students were young readers. “All the kids could read words, but sometimes didn’t know what they were reading. As they were thrown harder text, they were not taught how to break it down, how to attack it and read it for understanding.” This finding adds to the research of Applebee (1994) who found that a balanced approach to instruction (phonics and comprehension strategies linked to a variety of text) and appropriate scaffolding were essential to improved reading.

Most of the students did not apply what they had learned about reading comprehension to other content areas or to questions on the SDRT-4. One student
summed it up this way, “I like what Mrs. M teaches us, but I don’t think I use it that often. I guess I just keep doing it [reading] the way I been [sic] doing it.”

Results seem to indicate that students applied task-specific reading strategies for scanning and vocabulary, but did not utilize the variety of strategies associated with comprehension. This finding is suggested not only through SDRT-4 data, but also through the continued comprehension deficiencies of the students in their science and social studies classes (evidenced through interviews and low academic achievement). This finding indicates the need for instructional leaders to carefully examine how reading to learn is implemented in regular education, content-specific classrooms at the high school level.

Summary of Attendance, Academic Achievement, and Discipline Data

There was no statistically significant difference between students enrolled in the reading intervention class compared to those in the control group for the variables attendance and discipline. For both groups, truancy and number of discipline referrals increased from the 2002-2003 school year to the 2003-2004 school year. There was no difference between the two groups on academic achievement in English, mathematics, science, and world history as measured by end-of-course grades and scores on the Virginia Standards of Learning science exam.

These outcomes support the research of Juel et al. (1996) who found that students with poor reading skills frequently had lower self-esteem, encountered more disciplinary difficulties, and were less likely to graduate than more adept readers. The reading teacher surmised, “We need to have a strong core of teachers to help these kids get back on the right track from the beginning [of high school], but the teachers have to have the will. The kids are not going to be invested if their teachers aren’t.”

Summary of Effects of a Reading Improvement Class on School Experience

The effects of enrollment in a reading intervention class on school experience were defined in two ways: transfer of reading to learn strategies to content specific classrooms, such as English, mathematics, science, or world history and examining how students felt about participating in a reading intervention class.
Transfer of Reading to Learn Strategies

During interviews, participants were able to name and define a number of reading strategies (see Table 17). They could articulate how these strategies could help them increase their comprehension of text. However, these same students did not regularly apply the strategies in their core classes.

A conversation with RW illustrated her knowledge of the reading process:

Preparation is like knowing what you are getting ready to read and assistance is like when you're reading it, I guess you follow through and if you don’t understand it, ask for help. And reflection is to go back and read it if you don’t understand and think about what you have read and what it means. (Interview data, Record 45)

When this same student was asked if she had done this in her other classes, she responded, “No, but we do it with Mrs. M.” Clearly, a transfer of learning had not occurred.

This was confirmed by the reading teacher who explained,

I think one year in this program is not enough. It needs to follow them into 10th grade, or maybe they could continue until they test out. They were definitely not in the transfer stage. They would come in and do for me, but when they went into science or math or social studies, they would not do what I taught them. (Interview data, Record RT)

Other students stated they were using reading strategies in core classes; however, no differences in academic achievement were indicated in either the experimental or control groups. The students continued to struggle with the unfamiliar or technical vocabulary found in their textbooks.

SC complained:

The reading makes me not want to go to school. I just can’t understand what is going on because I didn’t read something well. I just try to do good [sic], but it’s frustrating.

The ability to understand expository text is the springboard to learning often missing in high school classrooms. This finding confirms the research of Beers (2003) who found, “the challenge is not the language itself, but what the reader does to interpret the text.”
Effects of Enrollment in a Reading Intervention Class

The reading intervention class was considered an elective course. Parents and guardians of the students were contacted prior to enrollment, and students were given the option to participate. The reality that unfolded was that the adults, not the students, made the choice. Several of the youngsters voiced displeasure in the beginning of the year. Said AW, “When I first got in the reading class, I didn't want to be there at all.” Another (BJ) complained, “When I first got there, it made me feel kind of dumb cause it was a small class and I was used to big classes.”

As the year progressed and as trust developed between the reading teacher and her students, the sense of isolation and embarrassment changed to feelings of empowerment and belonging. Students expressed an appreciation for their teacher who had provided ongoing guidance and assistance with reading in core classes. They described her as helpful, caring, and fun.

AC explained:

Some of our homework in other classes is reading. Mrs. M. will give us time to do our homework from social studies or science or English. That has brought my grades up. She'll help us to understand what we don't get. I love the class. (Interview data, Record 147)

Student JB expressed a similar opinion. Despite initial feelings of negativity about being in the class, the support and encouragement she received from the reading teacher affected her final outlook.

She asserted:

When I first got into the class, I did not like it! I thought it was, you know, for slow kids. But, then, Mrs. M. made us feel good about being there and she helped us work on other assignments and it was cool. I learned a lot of stuff and I like Mrs. M. I'd probably take the class again cause I got a lot of work done. (Interview data, Record 146)

Every student interviewed, with the exception of one (MM), expressed initial reservation and subsequent enthusiasm about the reading improvement class. I believe the ongoing assistance and encouragement provided by the reading teacher served as the catalyst for the trust that eventually developed between her and the students. They believed that the teacher truly cared about them and their learning. This replaced any initial concerns of embarrassment about being in a class that was “different.”
This finding supports the work of Langer (2001) who found that higher performing schools with predominantly poor and diverse enrollments were characterized by a collaborative engagement of students and teachers in a high-quality, cognitive learning environment. Simply put, students did not sit idly by while others learned.

Conclusions

*The fisher who draws in his net too soon,*

*Won’t have any fish to sell;*

*The child who shuts his book too soon,*

*Won’t learn any lessons well.*

I have spent much time reflecting about this study. At the heart of it is my belief that principals should be informed instructional leaders. We are in the business of educating and shaping the minds of our youth, and cultivating future members of society. Goodlad (1997) proposed that the purpose of schools was to educate children for the responsibilities of citizenship. I believe principals have a moral obligation to uphold that mission.

I do not profess to be a reading expert any more now than when I began this project; however, as an administrator who established a high school reading intervention class, I can offer the following conclusions based on the study:

1. A one-year reading intervention class for regular education 9th grade students that includes (a) 90 minutes of reading instruction and support on alternate days; (b) a balanced literacy instructional model, and (c) is taught by a knowledgeable, passionate, and caring teacher has no effect on the academic achievement by those students in their core content classes (English, mathematics, science, and world history).

2. A one-year reading intervention class for regular education 9th grade students that includes (a) 90 minutes of reading instruction and support on alternate days; (b) a balanced literacy instructional model, and (c) is taught by a knowledgeable, passionate, and caring teacher has no effect on school attendance by those students.
(3) A one-year reading intervention class for regular education 9th grade students that includes (a) 90 minutes of reading instruction and support on alternate days; (b) a balanced literacy instructional model, and (c) is taught by a knowledgeable, passionate, and caring teacher has no effect on the number of disciplinary referrals accrued by those students.

(4) A one-year reading intervention class for regular education 9th grade students that includes (a) 90 minutes of reading instruction and support on alternate days; (b) a balanced literacy instructional model, and (c) is taught by a knowledgeable, passionate, and caring teacher has no effect on the comprehension skills of those students as measured by pre and post tests of the Stanford Diagnostic Test-4.

(5) A one-year reading intervention class for regular education 9th grade students that includes (a) 90 minutes of reading instruction and support on alternate days; (b) a balanced literacy instructional model, and (c) is taught by a knowledgeable, passionate, and caring teacher has a positive effect on the vocabulary skills of those students as measured by pre and post tests of the Stanford Diagnostic Test-4.

(6) A one-year reading intervention class for regular education 9th grade students that includes (a) 90 minutes of reading instruction and support on alternate days; (b) a balanced literacy instructional model, and (c) is taught by a knowledgeable, passionate, and caring teacher has a positive effect on the scanning skills of those students as measured by pre and post tests of the Stanford Diagnostic Test-4.

Implications for Further Research

At the conclusion of this study, questions remain. These could lead to subsequent studies of principal leadership and reading to learn in secondary schools. What follows is a brief discussion of each.

First, in the Commonwealth of Virginia, newly certified teachers are required to complete a course on Reading to Learn and Write in the Content Area. I believe a study on how teachers are implementing this instruction in their classrooms is imperative. Like many other staff development initiatives, I have found inconsistent and uninformed implementation in the classrooms of this high school. An earth science teacher at my school, for example, indicated on a lesson plan that students would be engaged in a
“deep reading activity.” When I asked him what that meant, he responded, “You know, when the kids read in class.” Unfortunately, there are many teachers like him who attempt to go through the motions but do not have a clear understanding of what reading strategies are or how to implement them.

An in-depth case study of three or four high school teachers who have completed the Reading to Learn and Write in the Content Area course could be a first step in knowing how such mandates are affecting teacher practice. Data could be collected through field notes of classroom observations, audio-taped interviews with students from the classes and individual consults with the teachers. A video-taped roundtable discussion with the teachers sharing their experiences with reading to learn strategies could provide additional contextual elements. To augment the case study, a survey of teachers within the school could define the number of teachers who had completed the course, years of experience, reasons for taking the course, and examples of reading to learn strategies implemented in their classrooms. The research may lead to a new understanding of how the reading to learn mandate has affected teacher practice.

Second, while much has been studied about reading at the elementary and middle school levels, further study about reading is warranted at the high school level. A questionnaire sent to all Virginia high school principals seeking information about their school’s implementation of the state reading to learn mandate may provide examples of reading programs, policies, training, or scheduling paradigms that support reading to learn at the secondary level—or reveal inconsistent monitoring and implementation.

A case study of principals in two of those schools in which the reading to learn mandate was successfully implemented would follow. The study would focus on the following elements: (1) school vision and mission; (2) school culture; (3) instructional leadership, as perceived by staff and the principal; (4) teacher practice, and (5) an in-depth look at reading within the school. Data would be gathered through observations in faculty and community meetings (PTA, PTSO, advisory council), in classrooms, and through a careful scrutiny of artifacts—school newsletters, principal staff communiqués, visuals throughout the school, teacher training, and the school plan (if one exists). Interviews with the principal, teachers, parents, and students about reading instruction
would be audio-taped. The focus of the study would be instructional leadership in reading and teacher practice.

Third, a replication of the current study may be warranted, to include a change in purpose—to not only measure difference in student performance, attendance, and behavior, but also to examine reading and teacher practice. Recommendations for a replication study follow:

1. Utilize a different assessment instrument for pre and post tests to reflect a more discriminate measure in identifying differences in reading achievement. Collection of attendance, academic achievement, and discipline data would remain unchanged.

2. Develop a longitudinal study over a four year period—students would be enrolled for two years in the reading intervention class beginning in 9th grade. In addition to comprehension strategies, the students would be taught study skills and test-taking strategies. During their last two years of high school, students would be monitored using attendance data and nine-week academic achievement reports. Selection of participants for the study would remain unchanged.

3. Establish a reading core of teachers. Students enrolled in the reading intervention class would all share the same teachers in English, earth science, and world history during their 9th grade year and the same English teacher during their 10th grade year. Teachers of those students would be required to complete the state-mandated reading to learn course. They would meet monthly with the reading teacher to discuss teacher practice and reading instruction. These meetings would be video-taped and provide valuable information about reading and teacher practice. It should be noted that teacher involvement in the study would be voluntary.

4. Select five students for case study. Each student would be interviewed at least once per year during their four years of high school. Interviews would be audio-taped. Follow-up interviews may occur.

5. Observe both the reading intervention and core classes. Class observations would occur in the reading intervention class during the 9th and 10th grade years. Classroom observations would also occur in core classes during the 9th grade year and in the English class in 10th grade. Field notes from the observations would provide rich contextual information about reading to learn and teacher practice.
(6) Utilize a mixed methods research design. Statistical analysis of pre and post tests, in combination with attendance, discipline, and achievement data will be supplemented with descriptive data collected through interviews and field notes.

Reflections

The responsibilities associated with a school principalship are multidimensional and demanding, including the role of instructional leader. Most principals have minimal formal training to properly prepare them for such leadership (Brewer, 1993). The reality is many administrators, especially in high schools, do not focus on curriculum and instruction. Rather they concentrate on budgets, facility maintenance, athletics, issues related to personnel, and community relations. The introduction of the No Child Left Behind legislation with its high stakes accountability has changed the landscape somewhat so that principals now must focus on the desegregation of assessment data, remedial instructional programs, curriculum alignment, personnel evaluation and development, and instructional improvement to be effective leaders; however, the spread of this message across schools remains inconsistent at best (DeMoss, 2002).

The role of instructional leader requires a thorough understanding of the instructional process. Principals should recognize the need for structured, guided, and independent practice. They should be able to discuss and model effective pedagogy. Without this basic knowledge, I believe a principal cannot provide an effective clinical observation and evaluation of teacher instruction.

This was recently confirmed when the current principal of our school, who was then an assistant principal, indicated to me he had not placed a marginal science teacher on an action plan the previous year because “he didn’t know the process.” Clearly, there is a need for principal training to be systematically examined” (Heller & Pautler, 1990).

I began this study with a belief that principals have an obligation to students, teachers, and families to be the instructional leaders of their schools. While I am not the principal of my current school, many see me in the role of instructional leader.

A master’s degree in curriculum and instruction and my previous appointment as a member of the Instructional Support Team (a curriculum and professional
development position) have influenced my growth as an instructional leader. Through the years, I have developed a strong belief that reading to learn across content areas is the key to academic achievement in high school. It was where I wanted to start with my doctoral research.

I consciously decided not to investigate the purchase of a commercial reading program. Greenleaf et al. (2001) recommended against such programs and Irwin (2002) encouraged the use of evidence-based reading instruction. I decided to rely on the expertise of a reading teacher to establish a reading intervention class that met the specific needs of struggling learners.

During the same time period, I needed to convince the principal of the school to invest approximately $20,000 towards a reading intervention class for struggling readers who were neither special education students nor limited English language learners. I did so without a formal plan; only with the knowledge that effective reading comprehension was key to academic success. I proposed that we approach the project as a reading intervention pilot program, to be developed based on the specific needs of the students. I wanted to limit class size to 15, but due to budgetary concerns compromised at 20.

Once the principal had approved the funds and the teacher was appointed, I needed to identify students for the reading intervention class and to establish a control group. A random numbers chart was utilized for this purpose from a population of 8th grade students who had failed at least two SOL assessments. I telephoned the parent or guardian of each student before placing any individual in the class. I was surprised at the enthusiasm expressed by the family members. Many voiced appreciation for including their student in the study. They saw it as an opportunity for their child. I saw their reaction as a positive beginning.

I also needed to identify a teacher among the current staff who was qualified and willing to teach a reading intervention class, and be willing to teach an extra period (with compensation). This was crucial since I did not consider myself a reading expert, having spent my six years in the classroom as an art teacher. Although I had often integrated the art curriculum with social studies and English, I did not have the experience of a core content teacher. What did I know about “real learning?” I had confidence that my knowledge about effective instruction and curriculum development would serve me well.
In addition to what I had learned about reading from the research literature, I consulted with three reading experts about how the class should be structured and what assessment instrument should be used for pre and post assessments. While the dialogue was informative, I deferred to the reading intervention teacher in terms of instructional plans, pacing, and classroom activities. In the months prior to the 2002-2003 school year, she and I met regularly to discuss instructional strategies and research. These conversations led to the development of the reading curriculum for the intervention class.

Throughout the year, we continued to consult about what was happening in the classroom, and discussed various successes and frustrations. I remember one day in particular when the reading teacher flew into my office to tell me about a great discussion the students had had about a story they had read in class. The kids had been animated and enthusiastic during an analysis of text from an historical short story. They had read sections aloud and discussed such things as plot, dialogue, and setting. As the teacher explained to me that morning in my office, “The kids were really thinking about what they had read!” The read aloud, discussion, and interaction with the text had led to universal comprehension of the story.

Of course, for every good day, there could be an equally frustrating one. Students might not complete assignments or rush through them without devoting attention to detail. The level of commitment among the students was inconsistent, evidenced through truancy patterns and continued behavior problems. To maintain a neutral relationship with the students, I removed myself as a disciplinarian to any of the students in the study. However, they knew they were part of a study that I was pursuing. During informal visits to the class, they were friendly and open in their discussions with me about what was happening.

In the beginning of the year, many students expressed displeasure about being enrolled in the reading intervention class. They thought it was a class for “LD’s,” “dummies,” and “slow kids.” However, at the end of the year, these same students had reconsidered. This led me to the belief that students recognize and appreciate programs that are developed in their best instructional interest.

SG stated:
When I first got into the class, I did not like it. But then, Mrs. M. made us feel good about being there and she let us work on other assignments and it was cool. I would probably take the class again cause I got a lot of work done. (Interview data, Record 178)

The assessment instrument I selected for the pre and post tests proved to be problematic. Although the SDRT-4 was recommended by reading teachers and is designed for students who lack essential reading skills, I was concerned with its length (90 minutes) and the level of difficulty. I consulted with staff at Harcourt Brace, the company that published the SDRT-4. Their recommendation was to administer the level designed for students in grades 9.0-12.9. In retrospect, I believe the level designed for students in grades 6.5-8.9 would have revealed more accurate growth in reading. I would have found a way to administer the test over three periods of time. Ninety minutes was too long a period for students who struggle with reading to sit for an exam of this type. As an extrinsic reward, I provided Skittles and M & M candy during administrations of the pre and post tests, but a visible apathy emerged during the second half of both administrations. I watched as students played with their pencils, stared off in space, put their heads down, or tried to whisper to one another. I could feel the lack of energy within the room.

Another concern was the knowledge that the reading intervention students did not transfer the reading strategies they learned to other content areas. This could possibly have been resolved in two ways: (1) implement a mandated school-wide reading to learn program or (2) continue the reading intervention of students in the program until they tested out. Both solutions would have required commitment (both financial and professional) and instructional leadership from the school principal and knowledge, skills, and dispositions on the part of the teachers. It would also have necessitated a major cultural shift in the current high school pedagogy. Such change would have required time, training, collaborative planning, discussion, and resources. Unfortunately, the original principal's investment was limited to funding the program. He never became invested in the instructional concept. I believe this was due to the fact that there were other priorities--a state basketball championship, a highly recognized technology specialty program, a weak football team, and a forthcoming career change. Except for the accountability factor, instruction was never a clearly demonstrated focus.
Lessons Learned

This journey was a challenging one. To begin this venture with such a limited knowledge of the reading process was scary. Although I knew the reading teacher would be in the driver’s seat with respect to instruction, it was important for me to establish a knowledge base about reading. How could I implement a curriculum program I didn’t understand? As a former art teacher with limited core classroom experience, I had some work to do.

Over the past four years, I have grown immensely in my basic knowledge and understanding of the reading process (preparation, assistance, and reflection). I am now familiar with the research of prominent experts in the field (Beers, 2003; Guthrie, 1995; Harmon, 2002; Irwin, 2002, & Pressley et al., 2002).

I learned much about reading instruction from the intervention teacher. Just as she needed to establish trust with her students, I had to trust her to develop and implement an effective reading program. Mutual respect and trust were critical to our deliberations. While I could facilitate administrative aspects, I needed to rely on her in the classroom. I believe a principal cannot be an effective instructional leader in a vacuum.

Allington (2002) would most likely concur:

In the end it will become clearer that there are no “proven programs,” just schools in which we find expert teachers--teachers who need no script to tell them what to do. The question for the education profession--teachers, principals, professors, and policy makers--is, Are we creating schools in which every year every teacher becomes more expert? (p.747)

As we discussed what was happening in the reading classroom and as I observed the students interacting with text, I realized they wanted to learn, but their limited comprehension skills had prevented them from succeeding in school. This was often misinterpreted by classroom teachers who believed they were unmotivated or lazy. I got to know these students on a personal level and realized the inaccuracy of statements sometimes made by their teachers about them. This led to another epiphany--the need for staff development that infused reading comprehension strategies across the content areas. I saw a need for the faculty to participate in cultural awareness training as it relates to instruction. The story of MM illustrates the point:
Student MM was an anomaly. Each time I encountered him in the classroom, he was non-communicative. He never smiled and often glared when I spoke to him. Although he agreed to be interviewed, his responses were abrupt, often consisting of two or three word responses. Throughout the year there was a veiled hostility towards the reading teacher and me. On the other hand, he completed assignments in a timely manner and attended school regularly. Results of his pre and post tests on the SDRT indicated he had improved his scores in vocabulary and comprehension, but dropped in scanning. His academic achievement improved from 8th to 9th grade in English and social studies, but dropped in science and math. He earned three discipline referrals in 8th grade and none his freshman year. His improvement was inconsistent at best.

I have continued to see MM from time to time. Just recently, during a clinical observation of an English teacher, students were participating in a read-aloud from their literature books. Unfortunately, MM had not brought his book to class, and the teacher allowed him to just sit. I signaled for MM to share another student’s book and to read along silently. At first, he hesitated. I did not let him off the hook. He reluctantly complied. By coincidence, the young lady with whom he was sharing the book was called away from the classroom. I continued to observe him and saw that he had quickly become engaged in the reading. The next day, I saw MM in the hallway. I called him aside and told him how proud I was that he had continued to read the story in his English class. I intimated that I knew he was much smarter than he let others know. It was the first time I ever saw him smile.

I do not know what sort of life MM lives or what he encounters as a young black male. I do know there are many ways to build relationships and trust with students and without a positive relationship in the classroom and within the school, learning does not occur. We cannot give up on students like MM who may project an acrimonious facade, but have the potential to achieve.

I turn now to a discussion about assessment. My lack of knowledge and experience with testing materials put me at a disadvantage. While I had had experience training teachers and administrators to disaggregate testing data to inform instruction, I had never needed to select a testing instrument for program evaluation. I felt inadequate in this capacity and relied on other reading teachers to steer me in the right direction. Unfortunately, the resource staff at Harcourt Brace was superficial in their responses to my questions about the SDRT. I now believe that the testing level recommended by Harcourt Brace (grades 9.0-12.9) was incorrect. I should have trusted my initial instinct (based on readability) and selected a lower level for testing. It is my
belief that the test designed for grades 6.5-8.9 would have demonstrated a more accurate record of student performance and progress.

We expanded the reading intervention program during the 2004-2005 school year to two classes. This was due to a school division initiative that required double-blocking for students who had failed their 8th grade SOL reading and writing exams. The original teacher is no longer involved in the program, except as a consultant. Results thus far have been disappointing. The students who are participating are unenthusiastic about their classes, and one teacher has not demonstrated much commitment to the program. She complained to the English department chair, “I don’t really enjoy working with these kinds of kids.” This is quite a contrast from the previous reading teacher who said, “I seriously think these kids will work for teachers they respect and who respect them.” The depth of trust that Mrs. M had established with her students has not materialized with the current teachers and their students in the reading improvement classes.

During observations this year, I have witnessed a less creative involvement with text. There has been no painting, no role-playing. Students are not going to the library every two weeks. The learning seems to be less socially-constructed and is more teacher-driven. Students have been given fewer science and social studies readings and more generic worksheets to complete. It is unfortunate that increases in my overall responsibilities have led to less involvement with the reading classes, proving that without effective leadership, teacher passion, and continuous support and training of teachers instructional programs suffer.

A lack of focus in reading to learn continues in the school. A “not in my classroom” culture prevails. From observations and conversations with teachers at Meadow Park who have taken the state-mandated course that addresses learning to read and write in the content areas, there appears to be inconsistency with implementing reading strategies in classrooms. There has been no monitoring of these teachers by individuals who taught the course. Limited dialogue about reading occurs, except in faculty meetings when reading strategies are sometimes shared. There has been no reading instructional focus initiated by the principal. The reading teacher said it best: “It has to begin at the top.”
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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS ENROLLED IN READING INTERVENTION CLASS

1. What do you see as your greatest difficulty with reading?

2. Describe a time that a teacher helped you to really understand something you read in class. What did the teacher do to make the difference?

3. Describe your least favorite subject in school and explain why it is your least favorite.

4. You are given a homework assignment to read a chapter in your social studies textbook. How do you proceed?

5. What is the best method for a teacher to use to help you understand required reading?

6. In what ways do you use reading strategies in your everyday life?

7. Describe a teaching practice that hinders your ability to understand material in a textbook or on a handout.

8. What strategies do you use to understand a word problem in math?

9. How does your reading ability affect your experiences in school?
APPENDIX B

ITEM-DOMAIN VALIDATION INSTRUMENT

The following set of interview questions will be used to assess the school experiences of students enrolled in a reading improvement course. There are three domains to be explored: instruction, reading strategies, and self-assessment of reading. As you read each statement, please circle the domain that is best represented. Please note there are nine questions. If another domain not listed seems more appropriate, please write it down next to the question. Thank you.

1. What do you see as your greatest difficulty with reading?
   - instruction
   - reading strategy
   - self-assessment

2. Describe a time that a teacher helped you to really understand something you read in class. What did the teacher do to make the difference?
   - instruction
   - reading strategy
   - self-assessment

3. Describe your least favorite subject in school and explain why it is your least favorite.
   - instruction
   - reading strategy
   - self-assessment

4. You are given a homework assignment to read a chapter in your social studies textbook. How do you proceed?
   - instruction
   - reading strategy
   - self-assessment

5. What is the best method for a teacher to use to help you understand a required reading?
   - instruction
   - reading strategy
   - self-assessment
6. In what ways do you use reading strategies in your everyday life?

  instruction  reading strategy  self-assessment

7. Describe a teaching practice that hinders your ability to understand written material covered in class.

  instruction  reading strategy  self-assessment

8. What strategies do you use to understand a work problem in math?

  instruction  reading strategy  self-assessment

9. How does your reading ability affect your experiences in school?

  instruction  reading strategy  self-assessment
APPENDIX C

READING CLASS TOPICS OF STUDY

First Nine Weeks

• Learning Styles
• The Reading Process
• Organizational Skills
• Making Connections & Background Knowledge
• Study Skills

Second Nine Weeks

• Cueing Systems
• Word Study & Building Vocabulary
• Questioning

Third Nine Weeks

• Visualization
• Determining the Main Idea
• Inference

Fourth Nine Weeks

• Synthesizing
• Scanning/Chunking the Text
• Reviewing All Reading Processes and Strategies
It's about my Dad. The Police Action he been in jail back and forth bout 5 times. The plants there were plants cuz he sold weed a smoked it all the time. He been money from the weed he made lots of it and didn't send me anything. I haven't seen him for 160 of years. Gangs he was in one. He tried to get out and almost died. I don't know if he was still in it but I don't know. Police are dealt wit Police everyday. And went to jail. They guy smoked he smoked a lot. He thought about somethin' more than he thought his kids. Now he went to jail he went to jail all the time I don't know him anymore. I don't have a Dad.
APPENDIX E

HEALTH BOOK SCAVENGER HUNT

1. Who publishes your Health book? In what cities do the publishers have offices?

2. What are the side effects of high blood pressure?

3. What does “detoxification” mean?

4. What pages can you find information on vaccines?

5. What is the name of the bacteria associated with the illness “TSS”?

6. If you are codependent, what’s wrong with you?

7. List the five signs of stress.

8. Read the story on page 594. Why did Scott start drinking at the age of 11?

9. What is Scott’s advise to teens?

10. How much household waste can be recycled?
APPENDIX F

READING STRATEGIES AT STAFF MEETINGS (OCT 2003 – APR 2004)

- Examples of graphic organizers (October 2003)
  Provided formats for analyzing text (comparison charts, time line or sequence structures, cause and effect charts, cycle or pattern structures)

- Closure through Pair Summarizing (November 2003)
  Provided worksheet for student pairs to use in summarizing key points from a lesson (individual perspective vs partner perspective = combined perspective)

- Concept maps to identify topics and subtopics (December 2003)

- Vocabulary Organizer (January 2004)
  Students divide a paper into four components. Within each section, they complete the following tasks: identify the critical attributes of the vocabulary word, provide a synonym, an analogy and an illustration (components can change based on content)

- A Discussion of Four (February 2004)
  After reading a passage of text, students work in groups of four to describe, analyze, react to, and summarize what they read. Answers are recorded.

- Word Walls in the High School Classroom (March 2004)
  Post technical or key words from content lectures/textbooks. Include in lesson reviews and setting the stage.

- Mind’s Eye (April 2004)
  Students visualize keywords to make predictions, draw pictures, ask questions or describe feelings before reading a text.
APPENDIX G

STUDENT WRITING, SAMPLE 1

1. What would you change about your life?

   The only thing I would change is being more serious and quieter. I would have more things in life. I would have grad in a school with my family. For my talent in soccer and track. If I were more talented in grade school than sports and had a more serious attitude, I would be on my way to a top college in 4 years.

2. What would you change about your neighborhood?

   I wouldn’t change anything about my neighborhood because it’s a perfect neighborhood. It’s not a perfect white sicky neighborhood you have to be quiet or they are calling the police. You can be loud, quiet, it doesn’t matter no police come around my neighborhood.

3. What would you change about the world? I wouldn’t change anything with the world. I just call the terrorism in the world. It doesn’t make any sense that people are coming from different countries to bomb your most important buildings that have been here for more than their life.
People really do like dogs especially ones that are Rottweilers because they are nice but, when they start doing inappropriate things they want to put it to a cage or put it in a room when they go to the bathroom. Just like my dog, he used to do that be call Rosco. Don’t know where we got the name from. It is a pitbull that is mostly brown with some white underneath the chain. When it gets in trouble it puts his head down, cry, act like we don’t want it to its room. Like in a boy and his dog. My family and me all take care of my dog.

The END
I can't believe it had to happen to me. When I was in school know showed up. When I walked to my class a pumpkin sitting on the my teacher's table sitting next a coffee mug there was fire in the pumpkin. I thought it was a trick. It's 3 o'clock in the morning I have a school key that the principal gave me. I smelled a citrusy smellly in the air it was yardly lotion that fell. I walked out the class I heard something jiggling I figured it was a bobble head. It was a bobble head with Bisco. My teacher had a calculator poster on his wall. You could actually touch the buttons while I was walkin down while I heard the strange thing it was a bell. My cat snaffles has