

AT-RISK ELEVENTH GRADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL
DEVELOPMENTAL READING PROGRAMS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON READING
COMPREHENSION AND MOTIVATION

A Dissertation Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Education
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Katie L. Atkins

August, 2012

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the perceptions of struggling readers in the eleventh grade regarding the methods and motivational effectiveness of reading instruction provided to them in high school. Support must exist specifically for high school students in reading comprehension. Additionally, motivation plays a major factor when building high school students' reading comprehension skills. It is assumed that upon entering high school, students are proficient readers. However, due to recent national and state assessment results, this is unfortunately not the case. Instead, current trends in students' academic performance continue to become more rigorous, increasing the need for support for the furthering of students' ability to comprehend written text at a proficient level. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the following areas: 1) What specific challenges do at-risk high school readers report they face that keeps them from comprehending written text at a proficient level. A "proficient level" will be indicated by satisfactory scores on their most recent standardized state-mandated reading test, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), as well as Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test scores that reflect that the student is reading at least on grade level. 2) What do at-risk high school readers view as ways in which the school can help them achieve reading comprehension proficiency? 3) Based upon the students' perceptions, do the at-risk high school students feel they are receiving adequate support to achieve reading comprehension proficiency? 4) How do the perceptions of the particular students included in this study differ from those of their teachers regarding their progress in reading comprehension and motivation to read?

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Chapter I – Introduction

Statement of the Problem

It is assumed that upon entering high school, students are proficient readers. However, due to recent national and state assessment results, this is unfortunately not the case. Instead, current trends in students' academic performance continue to become more rigorous, increasing the need for support for the furthering of students' ability to comprehend written text at a proficient level. Support must exist specifically for high school students in reading comprehension. Additionally, motivation plays a major factor when building high school students' reading comprehension skills. It is necessary to explore the relationship between students' reading comprehension and motivation in effort to design programs that will effectively assist students in improving their reading comprehension skills.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to identify specific challenges that “at-risk” high school students face that affect their reading comprehension and motivation to read. Previous research conducted in this area has mostly yielded quantitative data that has been quite useful in suggesting best practices to improve students' reading comprehension. Often studies have focused upon student performance data, and while that data is useful in assisting educators to determine effective practices in reading comprehension instruction, students' personal reactions have often been overlooked and their voices have remained unheard. This study will build upon this pre-existing data and add a qualitative aspect that will consist of students' personal reactions to various interventions intended to improve students' reading comprehension and motivation to

read. This study will attempt to provide an in-depth insight from the perspective of high school students who struggle to read and what they feel has helped them personally to increase their reading comprehension and motivation to read. The data gathered from this study will be useful for educators to consider when designing reading programs for at-risk high school students.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study: 1) What specific challenges do at-risk high school readers report they face that keeps them from comprehending written text at a proficient level? A “proficient level” will be indicated by satisfactory scores on their most recent standardized state-mandated reading test, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), as well as Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test scores that reflect that the student is reading at least on grade level. 2) What do at-risk high school readers view as ways in which the school can help them achieve reading comprehension proficiency? 3) Based upon the students’ perceptions, do the at-risk high school students feel they are receiving adequate support to achieve reading comprehension proficiency? 4) How do the perceptions of the particular students included in this study differ from those of their teachers regarding their progress in reading comprehension and motivation to read?

Currently trends and issues exist that are associated with high school developmental reading programs. For the purposes of informing this study, an overview of current national standards for reading achievement for current high school students in the state of Texas is included and discussed. Subsequent sections explore the National Assessment of Educational Progress Model for Reading Instruction which address four major components of reading instruction as proposed

by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP): initial understanding, developing interpretation, personal response, and critical stance. This section is followed by an exploration of current research in the area of effective practices in reading comprehension instruction and will then lead into current issues in implementing effective reading programs and will include a review of research in the areas of Title I, reading teacher qualifications and education as set forth by the International Reading Association (IRA), and the effects of student motivation on reading achievement as it affects high school students.

The literature on the topic of reading programs and information regarding the reading achievement across the nation and in the state of Texas has created a sense of urgency in implementing developmental reading programs in high schools. The literature reveals that a great need exists for such intervention, yet many high schools do not have an established system for such an intervention. According to the *National Assessment of Educational Progress Achievement Levels Report* (2001), “All students at all levels should be able to respond to reading selections from all of these orientations.” An extensive review of the literature reveals that many students cannot accomplish this, and therefore intervention must be put into place. Therefore, for the purposes of this review, it is imperative for one to understand this issue as well as the standards set in place for reading achievement across the United States as well as the state of Texas and to observe how students across the United States and the state of Texas compare to the set standards.

Not only is it necessary to possess a firm knowledge of these standards, but it is of similar importance to understand the NAEP Model for Reading Instruction as a guideline of what is expected in reading programs nationwide. Therefore, for the purpose of this review, discussions of these two topics have been placed strategically side-by-side in the literature review to

facilitate a convenient synthesis of these standards and expectations. As a result, the review of literature on effective practices in reading instruction is presented and followed by a review of the current issues in implementing effective reading programs. The literature has reflected that a host of factors faced in high school such as school design, school funds, educator qualifications, various school programs (both imposed upon the school and implemented voluntarily), and student motivation have both positive and negative effects on developmental reading instruction at the high school level. It is therefore imperative for these issues to be explored when investigating the effects of approaches used in high school developmental reading programs.

This study utilizes mainly qualitative research methods as described by Carspecken that are based upon student interviews. Because of the ethnographic nature of the study, it is important to understand the characteristics of the participants of the study as well as an overview of the questions that will be used to conduct and guide the semi-structured interviews with the students and their teachers. Data collection procedures as well as analysis are explained subsequently and are divided into five stages: 1) compiling the primary record, 2) preliminary reconstructive analysis, 3) dialogical data generation, 4) describing the systems relations, 5) systems relations as explanations of findings.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this paper, a variety of standardized state assessments will be referenced when discussing student performance in relation to state standards. The following is a descriptive list of these assessments:

- Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS): Students taking the reading portion of the TAAS tests were asked to read six page-length selections that consisted of both fiction and non-fiction pieces. Following each reading selection, students were required to answer eight objective-style multiple-choice questions on each piece. According to the Texas Education Agency (2002), Students were asked fairly basic questions assessing students' ability to distinguish between fact and opinion, the order of events found in these short passages, and summarizing.
- Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS): Instead of reading shorter selections on various topics, the reading selections on the TAKS consisted of only two pieces, a fiction and expository piece, and a visual. While it was necessary for students to be able to understand basic elements of the plot of the story, students were now expected to discover connections between the two pieces. Whereas under TAAS students were reading shorter pieces, albeit more selections, the longer reading selections found on TAKS required that the student have more stamina while reading and more concentration, and ultimately be a better reader. According to the Texas Education Agency (2002), a new component was added to the TAKS test that had not previously been assessed on TAAS: the open-ended response.
- State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness/ End-of-Course Exam (STAAR/EOC): According to the Texas Education Agency (2009), the passing of Senate Bill 1031 in 2007 required the development of end-of-course/STAAR exams to more accurately assess students' academic success in the core areas, determine the students' level of college readiness upon graduating from high school, and determine the need for the availability of developmental courses in higher education following high school

graduation. Additionally, the end-of-course exam (STAAR) comprises 15% of the student's final grade in the course.

Chapter II: Review of the Literature

Reading Achievement Based upon Former TAAS Scores

According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the state of Texas accounted for 1,095,930 students attending public high school and 1,433 public high schools spread across 1,042 independent school districts in 2000. Tenth grade students were rated as the following based upon their scores received on the reading/language arts portion of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) test:

Table 1 Reading Achievement Based upon TAAS Scores			
Students in:	Partially Proficient	Proficient	Advanced
<i>All Schools</i>	9%	67%	24%
Title I Schools	15	71	15
High Poverty Schools	18	72	10
Students with Limited English Proficiency	49	50	1
Migratory Students	26	68	6
Students with Disabilities	33	63	5

Student achievement 1999-2000. (2002). Retrieved March 27, 2009, from <http://www.tea.state.tx.us/>

Structure of the Former TAAS Reading Test

The scores above were based upon the students' performance on the TAAS test which has now been replaced by the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) test which is more strenuous and demanding than the TAAS. Students taking the reading portion of the TAAS tests were asked to read six page-length selections that consisted of both fiction and non-fiction pieces. Following each reading selection, students were required to answer eight objective-style multiple-choice questions on each piece. According to the Texas Education Agency (2002), Students were asked fairly basic questions assessing students' ability to distinguish between fact and opinion, the order of events found in these short passages, and summarizing.

Structure of the TAKS Reading Test

When TAAS was replaced by its more rigorous successor, TAKS, students were required to demonstrate a higher level of thinking and application. Whereas TAAS had only required students to identify basic elements such as fact versus opinion, plot sequence, and summarizing, TAKS mandated that students begin to compare pieces of literature and draw inferences at higher levels than required by TAAS. Instead of reading shorter selections on various topics, the reading selections on the TAKS consisted of only two pieces, a fiction and expository piece, and a visual. While it was necessary for students to be able to understand basic elements of the plot of the story, students were now expected to discover connections between the two pieces. Whereas under TAAS students were reading shorter pieces, albeit more selections, the longer reading selections found on TAKS required that the student have more stamina while reading and more concentration, and ultimately be a better reader. According to the Texas Education Agency

(2002), a new component was added to the TAKS test that had not previously been assessed on TAAS: the open-ended response.

On the TAKS, students were required to respond to three questions based upon the two reading selections and answer these questions in writing. Students were to formulate their own thoughts and use textual support from the selections to support their answers to the questions. The first question was based on the fiction selection, the second question was based upon the expository selection, and the final question was based upon both, requiring the student to synthesize the information from both selections. According to the Texas Education Agency (2007), this last question would require students to notice similarities or differences between the two pieces in terms of characterization, theme, or plot events, thus requiring a higher level of thinking and reading. From examining the contents of these two tests, it is clear that the TAKS test increased in difficulty compared to its predecessor, the TAAS.

The percentages of students passing standardized tests in reading has also changed since TAAS has been replaced by the more rigorous standards assessed by the TAKS test. In three urban school districts in a large city in southeast Texas, the following results reflect the districts' performances in meeting the 2006-2007 TAKS accountability standards on the reading test:

Table 2 Percentages of Students Meeting Standard on 2007 ELA TAKS			
Dist rict:	Percentage in district meeting standard on ELA TAKS 2007	Percentage in state meeting standard on ELA TAKS 2007	Rank (out of 1,222 districts)
A	83%	89%	968
B	85%	89%	897
C	88%	89%	731

2006-2007 district performance summary. (2007). Retrieved March 27, 2009, from <http://ritter.tea.tx.us/cgi/sas/>.

According to the information above provided by the Texas Education Agency, each of these large urban school districts performs below the state average passing standard for the English/Language Arts TAKS test. In district A, 17% of its students do not meet the passing standard, 15% of students in district B do not meet the passing standard, and 12% of students in district C do not meet the passing standard. These standards are used to assess basic skills and are not used as an indicator of college readiness.

Possible Additional Influences on Reading Scores

Additional factors were also examined in this study to determine their impact upon academic performance as it pertains to reading scores. In the three urban school districts, additional factors including the percentages of economically disadvantaged students, attendance rate, student/teacher ratio, and percentage of funds spent on instruction will be considered and discussed later in this review to investigate their influences on reading scores and reading

comprehension. It must be noted that the following factors listed below do not solely impact reading scores. However, they ought to be taken into consideration because of the unique situations to which they lend themselves that may influence reading achievement. The following was reported by the Texas Education Agency in 2007:

Table 3 Possible Additional Influences on Reading Scores				
District	Percent economically disadvantaged	Attendance rate	Student/teacher ratio	Percent spent on instruction
A	78.1%	94.7%	16.79	61.2%
B	69.3%	94.6%	14.09	63.7%
C	81.3%	95.80%	14.94	60.5%

2006-2007 district performance summary. (2007). Retrieved March 27, 2009, from <http://ritter.tea.tx.us/cgi/sas/>.

When compared to the state averages in these respective categories, the results are as follows:

Table 4 2007 State Averages			
Percent economically disadvantaged	Attendance rate	Student/teacher ratio	Percent spent on instruction
55.5%	95.5%	14.69	58.9%

2006-2007 district performance summary. (2007). Retrieved March 27, 2009, from <http://ritter.tea.tx.us/cgi/sas/>.

Increasingly Rigorous Standards

A new standardized test, the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR) has been devised to replace the TAKS and was implemented during the 2011-2012

academic school year. Rather than requiring students to demonstrate basic knowledge and skills in four core areas (English/Language Arts, science, mathematics, and social studies) prior to graduation, students must be able to pass end-of-course assessments in core subject areas and will be implemented gradually. At the high school level, all ninth graders were administered the first STAAR tests in their core content areas during the 2011-2012 school year. The rigorous testing schedule for all students vastly differs from what has been in place in the past. According to the Texas Education Agency (2009), the passing of Senate Bill 1031 in 2007 required the development of these end-of-course/STAAR exams to more accurately assess students' academic success in the core areas, determine the students' level of college readiness upon graduating from high school, and determine the need for the availability of developmental courses in higher education following high school graduation. Additionally, the end-of-course exam (STAAR) comprises 15% of the student's final grade in the course, unlike the TAKS test which only affects the student in terms of a graduation requirement.

The Texas Education Agency (2009) reported that vertical teams were assembled to develop the end-of-course STAAR exams, as mandated by House Bill 1 during the 79th Legislature. During the Third Called Special Session, rules were adopted that defined college readiness as "being successful in entry-level credit-bearing college courses" (2009). Together with the Texas Education Agency, the State Board of Education began the revision process of the current Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) in the areas of the four core subjects (English/language arts, science, social studies, and mathematics) to include college readiness standards. Students' success in mastering these new standards and objectives are assessed through their performance on the end-of-course STAAR exams.

Characteristics of the End-of-Course State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness Exams (STAAR)

According to the Texas Education Agency (2009), specific characteristics governed the test item development. Test items were designed to address higher levels of thinking and reasoning not previously assessed on TAAS or TAKS. According to Sipple, Killeen, and Monk, these assessments themselves often seem to be the driving force behind instructional programs (2004, p. 164).

Nevertheless, the criteria for developing these items were two-fold. According to the Texas Education Agency, they were designed reveal a deep understanding of major concepts “in the context of challenging knowledge necessary for college readiness” and require the students to engage in problem solving, interpretation, and reasoning with precision and accuracy (2009). Students are also required to “draw complex inferences, analyze and evaluate information, think critically, interpret results, support logical arguments with evidence, support a position based on evidence in specific material the student has read, and write clearly and effectively” (Texas Education Agency, 2009).

Developing the End-of-Course STAAR Exams

According to the Texas Education Agency (2009), external review committees were formed to develop these rigorous standardized tests. The committee members were selected from a variety of professionals who reflected the diversity of the state. Members of these committees were experienced teachers and educators from across the state and were proven to be knowledgeable in their understanding of the TEKS as well as Texas College Readiness

Standards. Professionals from higher education also served on the committees to assist in determining the test items' alignment with college-readiness standards and the TEKS. The STAAR/ End-of-Course Exams were implemented during the spring semester of the 2011-2012 academic school year.

Implications for Additional Support for Reading Comprehension

The TAAS, TAKS, and now STAAR/ End-of-Course Exams have reflected a trend of continuously escalating levels of academic performance in all core subject areas. Therefore, one's ability to read increasingly challenging text is becoming more imperative. Presently, a significant number of high school students are not reading at the level set by the state. Additionally, many students' needs are not met under the current system. Reading classes are often not regarded as an issue to address at the high school level. Often remedial reading classes are reserved for only students with IQ scores that fall below the normal range and are classified as special education students, leaving out significant numbers of students in need of such classes (Fletcher et. al., 2002, p. 510). With the demands for academic success and college readiness, schools must be prepared to provide additional support for struggling students, particularly in the area of reading comprehension. One's ability to read and comprehend lays the groundwork for success in academic endeavors. If a student continues to struggle in this area, it will become extremely difficult for him to succeed in his other academic areas. Therefore, under the U.S. Department of Education, the National Assessment Governing Board has prescribed the National Assessment of Educational Progress Achievement Levels for Reading, which will be listed in this next section.

National Assessment of Educational Progress Model for Reading Instruction

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), reading results from an interaction among the reader, text, and context (2001, p. 6). Students must demonstrate an ability to comprehend information from a variety of texts in a variety of contexts. The following lists descriptions of the four stances from which students are to read:

Table 5 National Assessment of Educational Progress Model for Reading Instruction	
Initial Understanding	Students are asked to provide the overall or general meaning of the selection. This includes summaries, main points, or themes.
Developing Interpretation	Students are asked to extend the ideas in the text by making inferences and connections. This includes making connections between cause and effect, analyzing the motives of characters, and drawing conclusions.
Personal Response	Students are asked to make explicit connections between the ideas in the text and their own background knowledge and experiences. This includes comparing story characters with themselves or people they know, for example, or indicating whether they found a passage useful or interesting.
Critical Stance	Students are asked to consider how the author crafted a text. This includes identifying stylistic devices such as mood and tone.

National Assessment of Educational Progress achievement levels 1992-1998. (2001). Retrieved March 27, 2009, from <http://www.nagb.org/publications/readingbook.pdf>

In light of the fact that the NAEP has set the above standards to be assessed of all students in all grade levels, reading instruction must address these standards. Reading instruction must be available for all students in all grade levels and must utilize effective methods to engage students in the four orientations set by the NAEP as listed above.

Reading Comprehension Instruction during the 1920s and 1930s

Reading comprehension instruction has evolved over the years in response to the changing demands upon students by society. In the 1920s and 1930s, Edward Thorndike influenced the notion that learning was based upon associations, and therefore reading comprehension curriculum was deeply based upon research of human skill and performance (Gagne, 1977; Glasser, 1982; Resnick, 1985). As B. F. Skinner's influence in instructional psychology began to rise in the 1950s, reading comprehension curriculum took on a more behavioral and task-analytic approach that included programmed instruction, mastery learning, and behavior modification (Bloom, 1968). Such instructional programs and methods influenced nearly every subject area and every school and were not unique to solely reading comprehension curriculum and instruction.

Reading Comprehension Instruction during the 1950s and 1960s

Since reading comprehension was based upon such strong behavioral and task-analytic notions, reading comprehension was viewed by many as a skill that could be decomposed into sets of subskills such as sequencing events in a story, predicting outcomes of a story, drawing conclusions, and finding the main idea (Smith, 1965). Furthermore, due to the behavioral approach, it was believed that reading comprehension instruction to be improved by teaching students these necessary subskills to a minimal level of mastery (Rosenshine, 1980). Therefore, reading comprehension curriculum was viewed by many as a sort of assembly line in which each skill was mastered and resulted in adequate reading comprehension (Guthrie, 1973). However,

even in the 1950s some researchers questioned this behavioral approach to reading comprehension instruction. Sochor (1959) argued:

Much of the variability in what constitutes...reading is due to insufficient research evidence on the reading abilities themselves and on basic and related factors which might contribute. Research workers have been unable to clarify sufficiently the nature, independence or difficulty levels of comprehension abilities in reading. Consequently, those concerned with reading abilities resort to logic for a definition of...reading. (pp. 47-48)

Sochor's viewpoints on reading prompted further research into the nature of reading comprehension instruction and resulted in new understandings of the reading process and different views of what is important to teach and is discussed subsequently.

Reading Comprehension Instruction during the 1970s

As the 1970s progressed, research on the effects of teacher instruction began to increase. Prior to 1970, some researchers even thought that teachers did not make much of a difference in students' learning. Articles by Dunkin and Biddle (1974) and Rosenshine and Furst (1973) emphasized the need for more research to examine the effects teachers have on reading comprehension instruction. As a result, research turned to what was known as process-product research in reading comprehension instruction. This type of research called for an examination of instructional acts (processes) of effective teachers whose students scored high in reading comprehension on standardized tests (products). Through utilizing such research strategies, researchers began to identify specific strategies used by teachers that resulted in increased

reading comprehension scores on standardized tests. Such strategies that were identified were put into practice in reading comprehension instructional curriculum (Anderson, Evertson, & Brophy, 1979), thus resulting in the strategies discussed subsequently that were brought to light in the 1980s.

Reading Comprehension Instruction during the 1980s and 1990s

In the 1980s, Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, and Wilkinson (1984) stated that “Reading is a far more complex process than had been envisioned by early reading researchers; above all, it is not a set of skills to be mastered.” This viewpoint greatly contrasted widespread beliefs on reading comprehension and prompted a cognitively based view of reading comprehension. This new view of reading emphasized the interactive nature of reading (Rumelhart & Ortony, 1977) and the constructive nature of reading comprehension (Anderson, Reynolds, Shallert, & Goetz, 1977; Rumelhart, 1980; Spiro, 1980). Such a view emphasized the significance of background knowledge and its influence on the student’s understanding of the reading material coupled with strategies students employ to maintain understanding. Thus, the significance of prior knowledge was deemed important to a student’s ability to comprehend written material. It was suggested that students use their prior knowledge of a subject to construct meaning (Anderson & Pearson, 1984), determine importance (Afflerbach, 1986), draw inferences (Gordon & Pearson, 1983; Hansen 1981; Hansen & Pearson, 1983), to elaborate text (Hansen & Pearson, 1983), and to monitor comprehension (Dewitz, Carr, & Patberg, 1987).

However, even though a student may possess prior knowledge about a particular subject that may be helpful in interpreting and comprehending text, it does not necessarily mean that the

student automatically employs this prior knowledge. Therefore, it was suggested that this knowledge often lies dormant in the student's mind and often is not completely utilized in the comprehension process (Bransford & Johnson, 1972). Other times, the student's prior knowledge may be incomplete and therefore be misleading in his understanding of the text (Lipson, 1982). Often, when a student's prior knowledge of the subject matter is in conflict with the information presented in the text, the student's knowledge is perceived superior to the textual information and comprehension does not occur (Alvermann, Smith, & Readence, 1985). Therefore, the 1980s brought about a significant increase in the perceived importance of a student's prior knowledge in comprehending text and reading comprehension became viewed as much more complex than a mere mastery of subsets of skills as originally perceived under the behavioral approach as influenced by Skinner. This resulted in an emphasis on metacognitive awareness and strategies used to promote metacognition while reading that students could use and adapt to any text they read (Pressley, Johnson, et al., 1989). Therefore, attention was directed to strategies that would aide students in determining importance, summarizing information, drawing inferences, generating questions, and monitoring comprehension (Pressley, Goodchild, et al., 1989). Such strategies were viewed as occurring in a recursive rather than linear process as originally perceived under the behaviorist approach to reading comprehension.

As researchers studied the ways in which students determine importance, they identified three characteristics of good readers when determining importance. First, they use their world knowledge to allow access to and evaluation of the content of the text. Secondly, good readers use their knowledge of author biases and goals in order to help students determine importance of the text. Lastly, good readers use their understanding of the text structure to help them organize and identify information (Afflerbach, 1986). In terms of text structure, Meyer and Rice (1984)

define it as "...how the ideas in a text are interrelated to convey a message to a reader" (p. 319). Therefore, readers who have knowledge and utilize their knowledge of text structure recall more than readers who cannot (Meyer & Rice, 1984) and they use text structure to recall main ideas as well assisting them in comprehending the entire text. In 1984, Baumann compared two approaches: a skills-based approach to main idea instruction to a direct instruction approach. He found that students who received the direct instruction approach in determining main ideas improved their reading comprehension more than students who had been instructed in the skills approach to determining main ideas. In 1989, Wade and Trathen found that prereading questioning also assisted in recalling important information from text. From examining these studies, it can be concluded that one's ability to separate the important from the unimportant facts can foster effective comprehension.

Another key component of reading instruction emphasized in the 1980s and 1990s was one's ability to summarize information. According to Dole, Duffy, Roehler, and Pearson (1991), "the ability to summarize information requires readers to sift through large units of text, differentiate important from unimportant ideas, and then synthesize those ideas and create a new coherent text that stands for, by substantive criteria, the original" (p. 244). In the late 1970s, it had been suggested through the research of Brown and Smiley (1977) that summarization was developmental in nature. The more experience students had with text, the more they understood and were aware of how texts were organized. As a result, one's ability to summarize increasingly difficult text corresponded with the amount of exposure one had to text structure. Hidi and Anderson (1986) stressed the significance of producing summaries and the effect this practice has upon reading comprehension. Often summaries were written for a particular audience, such as a teacher or other students. Therefore, students focused upon length and grammatical structure

as well as pulling out the most important information. Hidi and Anderson (1986) identified three operations present when producing a summary. Students have to decide which information is important to select and what must be deleted. Some material must be condensed, and material must be integrated into a coherent and accurate representation of the original. Because of these operations that are necessary in order to produce an effective summary, summarization was viewed as an integral component of practicing and measuring reading comprehension.

One's ability to draw inferences was also seen as an important component to reading comprehension. According to Anderson and Pearson (1986), inference is at the heart of the comprehension process in that students must fill in details that are omitted and elaborate on what they read. While some researcher in the 1980s argued that inference was a skill that should be delayed until students were advanced enough to comprehend literal meanings, Hansen and Pearson (1983) believed differently. They helped students learn to draw inferences by giving them visual and kinesthetic reminders of how to use prior knowledge and text knowledge when generating inferences. Raphael and Pearson (1985) helped students develop strategies to help them determine whether a question about a particular piece of text must be answered by using prior knowledge alone, prior knowledge in combination with textual information, or textual information alone. Therefore, students were beginning to be led to use their own thinking when reading, thus allowing for more personal connection with the text. As a result of this support for utilizing inferences when reading, comprehension instruction during the 1980s began to emphasize inferences in reading comprehension curriculum.

In addition to the generation of inferences, reading comprehension instruction began to integrate student-generated questions. According to Brown and Palincsar (1985) student-generated questions also led to improved text comprehension and therefore began to be

employed in reading comprehension instruction. In a study conducted by Singer and Donlan (1982) high school students were given a set of general questions, such as “Who are the main characters in the story? What does the leading character want most?” A group of students was permitted to add their own questions as well and answer them when reading. As a result, the group of students who added their own student-generated questions to the basic teacher-generated questions performed higher in reading comprehension than their peers who only attended to the teacher-generated questions. Brown and Palincsar (1985) also conducted studies of the impact of student-generated questions upon reading instruction. In their studies, they concluded that students must be taught how to generate such questions; they did not begin constructing meaningful questions independently. Therefore, reading comprehension instruction began to emphasize the teaching of student-generated questions.

Comprehension monitoring was another strategy in reading comprehension instruction that began to be emphasized during the 1980s. According to Baker and Brown (1984), good readers are better than poor readers when monitoring, controlling, and adapting their reading strategies appropriately. They found that poor readers were less aware of breakdowns in reading comprehension. Therefore, reading comprehension monitoring became increasingly emphasized due to the research that took place during the 1980s. Reading comprehension monitoring became a two-fold process involving awareness of the clarity of one’s understanding and knowing what to do when comprehension declines. In 1987, Dewitz, Carr, and Patberg developed strategies to be used in reading passages to assist with reading comprehension monitoring. Specifically, students engaged in discussions about parts of the text with which they experienced difficulty. Through class discussion of the particular topic, comprehension was supported and students were able to gauge how their interpretations of the passages had compared to those of other students,

therefore allowing them to monitor their own comprehension. In a study conducted by Owings, Peterson, Bransford, Morris, and Stein (1980), students were given two stories to read that were of different levels of difficulty. The results found that students who comprehended the text at a higher level spent more time on the difficult passage than the easier one. However, students who scored lower in comprehending the passages spent the same amount of time on each. This study concluded that students who use self-monitoring strategies and adjust their reading strategies can comprehend at a higher level than those who do not use these self-monitoring strategies. As a result of such research, the importance of self-monitoring strategies when comprehending text became significant in reading comprehension instruction.

The instructional strategies in reading comprehension of the 1990s and 2000s were significantly affected by the research of the 1980s. Gurney, et al. (1990) examined the effectiveness of instructional strategies for teaching comprehension of literature to high school students. Modeling, guided practice, and independent practice were used as well as teaching related vocabulary, discussing background knowledge, attention to detail, and inferences. Gurney et al. reported that theme was the most difficult concept to teach to struggling readers. In 1994, Williams, Brown, Silverstein, and deCani developed an instructional approach to teaching students the concept of theme, helping students identify theme in stories, and apply themes to real life. During this time, a shift from basal readers to trade books occurred and trade books were used to gather various stories that related to a particular theme. Other stories were chosen that exemplified other themes. Students who had instruction using the method that utilized the trade books performed better in identifying theme than students who had used solely basal readers and had not had prior instruction of theme. Therefore, theme began to be viewed as an important component of reading instruction.

The 1990s also spurred the use of peer-mediated instruction in reading comprehension. In 1997, D. Fuchs, L. Fuchs, Mathes, and Simmons designed a comprehensive classroom package called Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies, or PALS. Under the PALS model, students engaged in a one-to-one peer tutoring program that included partner reading, paragraph summary, and prediction—all skills that have earlier proven a strengthening of comprehension skills. The program was found effective for average and low achievers in reading comprehension.

Reading Comprehension Instruction during the 1990s and 2000s

The 1990s and 2000s also began to direct attention to students' comprehension of expository material and not only narrative text. According to Stanovich and Siegel (1994), most reading that students are exposed to past 4th grade is mainly expository material, as is most text that adults find necessary to succeed at work and everyday life. Therefore, during the 1990s and 2000s, more attention began to be paid to helping students succeed in comprehending expository text. This has become of utmost importance as American society is becoming increasingly technologically advanced (Lapp, Flood, & Ranck-Buhr, 1995). Many strategies exist that are intended to enhance students' comprehension of expository material, such as passage organization training, self-questioning procedures, mapping organizers, interrogation strategies, SQ3R, generalization induction, summary skills training, and instruction on question-answer relationships. In 1996, Boyle studied the effects of a cognitive mapping strategy with middle school students. Using a mnemonic device, Boyle provided the first letter in each step of the mapping procedure that was used on challenging reading material. It was found that students

who used this mapping procedure performed better in reading comprehension than students who did not. As a result, their comprehension of the expository material improved.

In another study of comprehension of expository text, Mastropieri, Scruggs, Hamilton, Wolfe, Whedon, and Canevaro (1996) taught seventh and eighth grade students to “reason actively through information presented in each sentence” (p. 1). Following each sentence about vertebrate animals, students were told to ask themselves “Why does that make sense?” Students saw the self-questioning technique modeled and were then told to apply this strategy to their own texts. Students who had seen the procedure modeled and then used it themselves comprehended more than students who had not done this. As a result of studies such as these, more attention was given during the 1990s and 2000s to strategies used to comprehend expository text. Multiple strategies began to be used in teaching reading comprehension rather than the methods that utilized one strategy at a time such as those seen prior to the 1970s.

The importance of a student’s motivation to read has also been something that has been investigated for quite some time, but has been especially highlighted during the 1990s and 2000s. The 2000s have called for a change in reading materials for students, especially in school curricula, arguing that “...looking at what students are required to read in school in 2010, it might as well be 1960. We need visionary educators who see bold purposes for school and who understand that what students read in school has profound, lifelong effects, both good and bad” (Wolk, 2010, p. 1). Wolk argues that students simply are not motivated to read because of the archaic selections presented them in the classroom. If students are not motivated to read and do not see any relevance in doing so, then they simply will not and therefore reading comprehension will not be practiced or enhanced. Wolk (2010) further states:

If we want to nurture lifelong reader and thinkers, to cultivate social responsibility, to make reading relevant to the 21st century, and to bring joy to reading, then the status quo will not suffice. The status quo will only continue to teach kids to hate reading and to see education as irrelevant. When seen cumulatively, the reading students do in school appears to be designed to make reading painful, tedious, and irrelevant. (p. 1)

In a study conducted by Strommen and Mates (2004), 151 6th and 9th grade students were interviewed and it was determined that only 12 were actual readers outside of school. In a National Endowment for the Arts study (2007), it was reported that nearly half of 18 to 24 year olds never read a single book for pleasure and that only 30% of 13 year olds read for fun. If students are not motivated to read, this can have a significant impact on their reading comprehension. They will be reluctant to read which will result in a lack of practice in reading. When they do read, they will be disengaged because of the lack of relevance the material presents. While currently schools have not adopted reading curricula that entirely addresses this issue, awareness of this issue is becoming more widespread and one can only hope that progress continues in this vein.

Current Effective Practices in Reading Instruction

A variety of methods exist that can be implemented to address the four orientations prescribed by the NAEP. It is important to note that these methods can be most effective when used in combination with other methods and can also provide additional implications for structuring a reading program. The following are descriptions of effective methods used in fostering reading comprehension.

Think-Aloud

One particularly effective method in helping students develop reading comprehension skills is the think-aloud. This strategy assists the reader in thinking about the way in which he or she makes meaning from text. While the student reads, the student pauses and reflects on the connections that are being made, images that are created in one's mind, problems with understanding that the students are encountering, and solutions that can be used to fix those problems. According to Kylene Beers, "this oral thinking not only helps the teacher understand why or how a student is having difficulty with a text but also allows the student to analyze how he is thinking about his reading. This type of metacognitive practice builds independence in reading" (Beers, 2003, p. 119). The following steps are suggested by Kylene Beers when implementing the think-aloud strategy:

1. *First, model thinking aloud.*
2. *Before you begin to think aloud, tell students that as you read a passage aloud, you will be stopping to think through what you are reading.*
3. *As you read the text, stop frequently to talk about how you are analyzing what happened in the text.*
4. *As you stop to report out, give students a verbal or visual cue that you're switching from reading the text to thinking aloud.*
5. *Sometimes, as you report out, jot your comments down on a transparency as you make them.*
6. *After you've modeled thinking aloud a few times, have students try it on a portion of the text with a partner*
7. *Provide ample opportunities for students to practice thinking aloud.*
8. *Give students a chance to reflect on how the think-aloud has changed their reading habits.*

(Beers, 2003, p. 123-125)

Small Group Reading Instruction

In a study conducted by Rashotte, MacPhee, and Torgesen (2001), 115 students from low socioeconomic schools were placed into small groups of 3-5 students each. The students were selected for these groups based upon poor phonetic decoding and word-level reading skills. The students were randomly assigned to either a regular classroom setting or a specialized small group. These students left the regular classroom during the language arts period to be instructed in the smaller group of 3-5 students while their peers were left in the regular classroom setting of approximately 15 students per class. While some effort was given to incorporate phonics into this large group instruction, the program was mainly literature based and used basal readers as well as novels (2001, p.122).

Students in the small group received instruction for 50 minutes each day and engaged in cooperative learning. According to research conducted by Slavin and colleagues, cooperative learning is a main characteristic found in effective reading programs (2008, p. 309). The small size of the groups is also especially helpful in allowing teachers to focus on students who are “losing out” or falling behind the group (Leinhardt et. al., 1981, p. 358). The goal of this program was to have the students become proficient in reading fluency and spelling in order to facilitate reading comprehension and efficient writing (Rashotte, MacPhee, & Torgesen, 2001, p. 123). The results revealed that students in the small groups showed significant gains in phonological awareness, phonetic decoding tasks, reading accuracy, comprehension, and spelling compared to the gains of the students in the larger groups (Rashotte, MacPhee, & Torgesen, 2001, p. 131).

While the students in the smaller groups demonstrated greater skill in these areas compared to the students in the larger groups, it cannot be determined that the students performed better simply because they were placed in a small group setting. Teachers of the smaller groups used a variety of methods not used by the teachers of the large groups. Perhaps the students in the small groups benefitted from these particular methods presented by their teachers. Nonetheless, the students in the small groups did significantly outperform their peers from the larger groups on tests measuring accuracy, comprehension, fluency, and phonological awareness, thus creating positive implications for the usage of small groups in delivering explicit reading instruction to struggling readers (Rashotte, MacPhee, & Torgesen, 2001, p. 131).

Somebody Wanted But So

Often a seemingly simple task such as summarizing can become a difficult task for students to master. Kylene Beers offers a strategy called Somebody Wanted But So to assist students in developing summaries to help them comprehend text. After students read a story, they are to decide “who the ‘somebody’ is, what that ‘somebody’ wanted, but what happened to keep something from happening, and so, finally, how everything works out” (Beers, 2003, p. 145). Not only does this strategy help students develop summaries, but it also helps in identifying main idea and details, noticing cause and effect relationships, making generalizations, viewing differences in characters, and determining how the shifts in point of view emphasize various aspects of a story. (Beers, 2003, p. 149).

Strategy Instruction

The effects of teaching students specific strategies to use while reading has been a topic of interest and examination. In a 1998 study, Alfassi examined the effects of strategy instruction upon reading comprehension. According to Alfassi, “This view assumes an active reader who constructs meaning through the integration of existing and new knowledge uses strategies to foster, monitor, regulate, and maintain comprehension” (1998, p. 311). Alfassi’s study included 75 freshmen high school students from large suburban high schools who were identified as performing at least 2 years below grade level in reading comprehension as reflected on state standardized test scores. The experimental group consisted of 53 students who were divided into five reading classes. The control group included 22 students who were divided into three reading classes (Alfassi, 1998, p. 316).

Students in the experimental group received strategy instruction and reciprocal teaching, while the control group utilized skill acquisition. The students in the experimental group who received that strategy instruction and reciprocal teaching demonstrated greater achievements in reading comprehension than the students in the control group who did not receive this instruction based upon their scores on the Gates MacGinitie Reading Test that was administered at the end of the instructional sequence (Alfassi, 1998, p. 322).

Based upon Alfassi’s study, it can be concluded that a model of instruction in which the student is guided to monitor his own comprehension is more effective in developing reading comprehension than methods currently employed in traditional instruction.

In a study conducted by Genevieve Manset-Williamson and Jason M. Nelson, a balanced, strategic approach to reading instruction was explored. Two strategies that focused on decoding,

fluency, and reading comprehension with students with reading disabilities were examined. They found that it is imperative for students who need to improve their reading fluency to practice reading connected text to help in developing automaticity in word identification (Manset-Williamson & Nelson, 2005, p. 60). Without this skill, reading comprehension suffers due to the reader's inability to continue reading without hindrance. The researchers also found that students with reading disabilities do not possess adequate skill in effecting strategies to assist them in reading comprehension when encountering difficulty while reading and that a balanced instructional approach between direct instruction and constructivist approaches is beneficial for students who struggle with reading comprehension (Manset-Williamson & Nelson, 2005, p. 71).

It Says—I Say—And So

Often struggling readers have difficulties making inferences and fail to utilize prior knowledge to inform their reading comprehension. The strategy “It Says—I Say—And So” assists such readers in organizing their thoughts when connecting information from the text to their prior knowledge. (Beers, 2003, p. 165) Kylene Beers suggests the following steps in achieving quality results when implementing this strategy:

1. *Question: Read the question.*
2. *It Says: Find information from the text that will help you answer the question.*
3. *I Say: Think about what you know about the information.*
4. *And So: Combine what the text says with what you know to come up with the answer.*

(Beers, 2003, p. 167)

Transactional Instruction

Transactional instruction refers to the process by which students' and teachers' transactions with the text aide in building students' use of strategies that develop students' reading comprehension. According to Michael Pressley of University of Maryland and colleagues, this approach to reading instruction has produced some valuable and beneficial results in reading comprehension (Pressley et. al., 1992, p. 514). Based upon the seminal research of Louise Rosenblatt and her transactional theory, a transaction between the reader and the text are crucial to fully comprehending the message presented by the text (1938, p. 7). It has been noted by Macias during his study of Mexican immigrant students that such instruction that involves such interactions can be especially beneficial for the learner (1990, p. 310)

The research of Pressley and his colleagues identified strategies necessary for reading comprehension to occur, which consisted of summarization, prediction, visualization, thinking aloud, story grammar analysis, text structure analysis such as webbing, prior knowledge activation, and self-questioning (Pressley et. al., 1992, p. 524). The researchers observed students engaged in a small-group lesson. Many of the second-grade students were identified as struggling readers and were reading *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak. When students' encountered words they did not know, which as a result would hinder their reading comprehension, the teacher engaged the students in a series of strategies to help them reconstruct their understanding. Such questions included statements such as "Marie's at a big word, and she wants to skip it. Do you want to keep reading and see if there are any other words that can help you understand the one you want to skip?" (Pressley, et. al., 1992, p. 518).

By guiding students through questions such as these, the teacher was able to help the student engage in a transaction with the text and become cognizant of strategies to use when comprehension faltered. It is important to note that the teacher was given the freedom to adjust the pace of the class to suit the needs of the students and seize “teachable moments” to help students begin building such transactions on their own.

In a study conducted by John T. Guthrie and colleagues, transactions between the reader and the text have also been found to be particularly effective in students’ reading abilities. While observing thirteen-year-olds who were reported to read often, the researchers found that those students reported discussing, asking questions, and sharing information more than students who read less. Additionally, thirteen-year-olds who were avid readers also reported that they used a high number of cognitive strategies while reading to help them comprehend the text (Guthrie, et. al., 1995, p. 18). Therefore, it can be inferred that a characteristic of an avid reader is the behavior that results from such transactions between the reader and the text.

The International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English have developed standards for goals and implementation of an effective reading program. All strategies must seek to address the standards for the following goals and implementation:

Table 6	Standards for Goals and Implementation of an Effective Reading Program
Goals	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The interests of the student are paramount in assessment. 2. The primary purpose of assessment is to improve teaching and learning. 3. Assessment must reflect and allow for critical inquiry into curriculum and instruction. 4. Assessments must recognize and reflect the intellectually and socially complex nature of reading and writing and the important roles of home, school, and society in literacy development. 5. Assessments must be fair and equitable. 6. The consequences of an assessment procedure are the first, and most important, consideration in establishing validity of the assessment.
Implementation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The teacher is the most important agent of assessment. 2. The assessment process should involve multiple perspectives and sources of data. 3. Assessment must be based in the school community. 4. All members of the educational community must have a voice in the development, interpretation, and reporting of assessment. 5. Parents must be involved as active, essential participants in the assessment process.

Standards for the assessment of reading and writing. (1994). Retrieved March 20, 2009, from http://www.reading.org/Libraries/Reports_and_Standards/bk674.sflb.ashx

Such standards must drive the development of any type of instructional method utilized. The teacher must use such standards to evaluate the effectiveness of his or her instruction. Failure to do so may result in ineffective instruction and, even more detrimental, an ineffective program that does not meet the literacy needs of the students. Schools must remain aware of such standards when adopting any new program or curriculum. While this is by no means an exhaustive list of every reading method used to enhance students' reading comprehension, it

provides a framework and foundation from which teachers can develop their instructional methodologies. Characteristics include small, student-centered groups and interactive instruction in which the student is actively involved in learning, not only from the teacher but also through discussions with other students. This helps in developing motivation to read. Teachers use “teachable moments” and are not forced to conform to a specific curriculum; teachers have the freedom to adjust the pace of the class to the individual needs of the students. Students are taught to become aware of strategies to employ when reading comprehension is threatened and how to use these strategies when reading on their own, thus creating independent readers.

Current Issues in Implementing Effective Reading Programs

A variety of factors exist that affect the implementation of effective reading programs. The structure of a school can either assist the teacher in facilitating an effective reading program for the students, or can become a contributing factor to an unsuccessful reading program. The preparation and education of a reading teacher can also play an instrumental role in the effectiveness of a reading program. The reading instructor must be a highly-trained individual who possesses the knowledge and experience to address the needs of diverse learners and can seek out methods most appropriate and effective for his or her students. Motivation of the student to even have the desire to read or improve reading skills and comprehension is also a major factor influencing a student’s success. If this is not realized and taken into consideration when developing a program, it will become an utter failure; if the student does not want to read, he simply will not make the effort to do so, thus creating a significantly negative impact on the effectiveness on any type of reading instruction employed by the teacher.

School Structure and Limitations

Underachieving schools is a hot topic of conversation at present, but this issue is not something that has recently arisen. In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed. Under this Act, the Title I program entered existence as part of the “War on Poverty” to help improve the education of students who were considered economically disadvantaged. By 1984, more than \$40 billion was expended on this program. Because of the vast sums of money spent on the program, the U.S. Department of Education found it necessary to ensure that Title I funds were spent in the most effective way. As a result, it became necessary to evaluate the academic results of students benefitting from Title I funds. Testing became the easiest way to evaluate this effectiveness (Carter, 1984, p. 6).

Along with this evaluation of effectiveness of Title I funds, schools receiving such funds have resorted to utilizing “research-based” programs that claim to be instructionally sound methods of instruction, promising positive instructional results. However, according to the research of Fred M. Newmann, Betsy Ann Smith, Elaine Allensworth, and Anthony S. Bryk, a problem has arisen from such massive “buy-in” schools place in these improvement programs. Schools have continued to pilot such programs, but do little to establish coherence among the programs they continually add to their academic programs (Newmann et. al., 2001, p. 298). This over-indulgence in many varieties of professional development programs and school programs is observed also by Jacob and Lefgren who assert that school districts and states place too much reliance on these programs in hopes that they will improve student learning (2004, p. 51). Cohen, Raudenbush, and Ball support this notion by stating that the effectiveness of such resources depend upon how the resources are used (2003, p. 120). In establishing program coherence,

Newmann and colleagues identify the presence of three major conditions in a school and the effects of those conditions as detailed below:

Table 7 Conditions and Effects in Establishing Program Coherence	
Condition	Effects
Common instructional framework guides curriculum, teaching, assessment, and learning.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Curriculum, instruction, and assessments coordinated among grade-level teachers. 2. Curriculum and assessments progress in a logical sequence from each grade level. Material becomes more complex. 3. Student support programs available (tutoring, parental involvement) that focus on school's framework.
Staff working conditions support school framework.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Administrators and teachers alike implement framework. 2. New teachers hired based upon framework criteria. 3. Teachers evaluated on how they execute framework criteria. 4. Professional development geared to build upon framework already in place.
School funding, materials, staff assignments used to build upon framework already in place so as to avoid scattering resources and create most effective improvements.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stable curriculum. 2. Teacher assignments are stable so they can become expert teachers in their specific roles.

Newmann, F.M., Smith, A., Allensworth, E., & Bryk, A.S. (2001). Instructional program Coherence: What it is and why it should guide school improvement policy. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 23, 297-321.

Such a program as proposed by Newmann and colleagues would require dedication to a particular instructional framework over an extended period of time in order to observe accurate effects of the program. Dedication to the instructional framework by all members of the school as well as the administration and district administration would be essential in its success.

However, in most cases of schools receiving Title I funds, the federal programs are both administratively and instructionally separated from the regular school program, making Title I efforts less effective (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2000, p. 141). Additionally, Allington asserts that the Title I program has been a program much too large too scantily funded to accomplish the goals intended (2000, p. 141). Efforts must be made to ensure all students in Title I schools can equally benefit from such funds. Because of the enormity of the program, it was revealed that special education students mainstreamed into classes received 35 minutes a day less than students in their regular education classrooms (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 1989, p. 538). Title I funding has become widespread across many school districts across the United States. Currently, only 35 of 1,032 school districts in the state of Texas do not receive Title I funding (*Title I grants to local educational agencies: Texas—allocations under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*, 2008).

Reading Professional Qualifications and Education

In addition to the necessity for a quality reading program, it is of equal importance for schools to employ quality reading professionals to run these programs. The International Reading Association sets standards for five categories of reading professionals and expects each to fulfill specific duties and be involved in reading instruction through a variety of capacities.

The Paraprofessional

The paraprofessional is expected to assist in either a regular or special education classroom and serve students in grades beginning at preschool through high school levels. The or she must have a minimum of a two-year postsecondary degree emphasizing human development and educational processes along with a minimum of 12 semester credit hours in literacy and language development (*International Reading Association: Standards for reading professionals*, 2003).

The Classroom Teacher

The classroom teacher may teach students in early childhood through high school. The teacher is expected to develop students' reading and other related language arts activities. He or she must have either an undergraduate or graduate degree with at least 12 hours of coursework in reading instruction (*International Reading Association: Standards for reading professionals*, 2003).

The Reading Specialist

The reading specialist teaches students from early childhood through adult levels. The reading specialist must be able to fulfill the duties of a reading intervention teacher, a reading or literacy coach, or a reading coordinator. These specialists are to serve resources for school personnel, plan reading programs for diverse learners, provide professional development, and provide leadership in student advocacy. They are to have previous teaching experience, a

minimum of a Master's degree with a concentration in reading education, and minimum of 24 graduate hours in reading and language arts instruction, and 6-semester hours of supervised practicum experience (*International Reading Association: Standards for reading professionals*, 2003).

The Teacher Educator

The teacher educator is to instruct students at either the graduate or undergraduate levels and engage himself or herself in scholarly work and professional development. The educator is to develop partnerships between schools and universities and must have at least three years of teaching experience in the area of reading as well as a terminal degree focusing on reading instruction (*International Reading Association: Standards for reading professionals*, 2003).

The Administrator

Principals and superintendents are key components to facilitating effective reading instruction. Under their supervision, a reading program can flourish or become demolished. Therefore, this professional is often a decisive factor in the success of a reading program. They are expected to support other reading professionals as they plan and implement reading instruction. Principals are to have at least 6 credit hours in reading instruction (*International Reading Association: Standards for reading professionals*, 2003).

Standards for Reading Professionals

The International Reading Association has set standards by which reading professionals must be evaluated. According to the Standards for Reading Professionals, reading professionals must provide evidence of meeting the following five standards:

1. Candidates have knowledge of the foundations of reading and writing processes and instruction.
2. Candidates use a wide range of instructional practices, approaches, methods, and curriculum materials to support reading and writing instruction.
3. Candidates use a variety of assessments tools and practices to plan and evaluate effective reading instruction.
4. Candidates create a literate environment that fosters reading and writing by integrating foundational knowledge, use of instructional practices, approaches, and methods, curriculum materials, and the appropriate use of assessments.
5. Candidates view professional development as a career-long effort and responsibility. (*International Reading Association: Standards for reading professionals*, 2003).

The International Reading Association has specific expectations and requirements for all types of reading professionals. Such professionals are instrumental in the implementation of an effective reading program. When making hiring decisions regarding such professionals, it is important to remain cognizant of the responsibilities and standards to which these professionals

are held since they play such a vital role in facilitating reading instruction and meeting the needs of the students.

Student Motivation

Not only do the teachers and school structure affect a student's reading ability, but the student himself does as well. The motivation of a student to succeed in reading plays a crucial role in his or her success to do so. A study conducted by Sideridis, Mouzaki, Simos, and Protopapas explored the relationship between a student's motivation to read and his ability to do so. Their study was twofold and examined the question of whether motivation, emotions, and psychopathology were significant predictors of reading comprehension difficulties and ways in which these factors interact with these cognitive variables to create student profiles as they relate to reading comprehension (Sideridis, et. al, 2006, p. 161).

The students used in the study were 587 students in the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades. All students were general education students. Students' abilities were measured in the areas of reading accuracy, spelling, text comprehension, receptive and expressive vocabulary, reading motivation, anxiety, and depression. They found that lack of motivation can have a negative effect on a student's reading success, especially as the student gets older (Sideridis et. al., 2006, p. 176).

This finding provides important implications for reading instruction. Students must feel motivated to read in order to succeed in reading. Johnston, Allington, Guice, and Brooks call for the necessity of change in the reading classroom. A classroom-learning community in which students can take control of their own learning, engage in conversation, choose their own books,

and assess their own progress is necessary in order to build motivation to read. However, it remains a common practice for teachers to determine what will be read and when it will be read, therefore hindering the locus of control from shifting to the learners (Johnston et. al., 1998, pp. 87-88).

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress data, students who read daily for their own enjoyment were 6.7 standard errors higher in reading achievement than students who reported reading yearly or never (Guthrie et al., 1999). Clearly student motivation to read significantly impacts the amount of time a student spends reading for his own enjoyment. Students must be afforded the opportunities and led to experience opportunities in which he or she can glean personal meaning from text. According to Ruddell and Unrau (1997), “Meanings are open—not closed or fixed—though they need to be grounded in the text. Readers and teachers may share common understandings in the interpretive community; however, those understandings are not forever fixed.” Therefore, Ruddell and Unrau presented the following guidelines that teachers may apply in order to promote students’ motivation to read and therefore develop literacy skills:

1. Provide for the exploration of student identity, its roots, and its possibilities; acknowledge that each student has self-schemata that shape behavior and warrant understanding; devise activities and interactions that bolster reflection and self discovery.
2. Design an environment that intentionally builds student self-worth rather than one that unintentionally threatens it.

3. Promote a climate in which students work toward task-oriented goals that foster a sense of mastery and competence.
4. Develop an atmosphere in which students see that the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and strategies is incremental and proceeds through efforts that become increasingly self-regulated.
5. Activate and extend students' background knowledge to facilitate meaning construction.
6. Model reflectivity and metacognitive processes for students.
7. Design tasks that are perceived as important to students, that involve real-life issues, that have subjective and community-related interest, that are seen as useful in relation to students' future goals, and that provide the chance for the experience of flow.
8. Establish literacy expectations that are appropriate to each student's capacities and provide support for the attainment of those expectations.
9. Encourage the flexibility to view experience from multiple perspectives and to adopt instructional stances that promote literacy engagement; encourage, when appropriate, an aesthetic stance in response to reading in order to engage more of the experiential self and its narrative and imagery.
10. Discover and use students' sociocultural values and beliefs as resources for constructing an environment that reflects students' orientations while developing understanding of and tolerance for alternative value and belief systems.

11. Allow students to gain a sense of ownership and share authority in the interpretation of texts and criteria for validation of those interpretations.
12. Formulate or select tasks that are suitable to students' task-engagement resources and that allow students to internalize knowledge and skills to become increasingly independent, self-regulating, and self-reliant learners.

By implementing such guidelines, a teacher may assist students in their motivation to read, which will, in turn, result in an increased amount of time spent reading, resulting in an increase in the students' literacy skills.

Chapter III - Methodology

The purpose of this research study was to identify specific challenges that “at-risk” high school students face that affect their reading comprehension and motivation to read. Previous research conducted in this area has mostly yielded quantitative data that has been quite useful in suggesting best practices to improve students’ reading comprehension. However, this study will build upon this pre-existing data and add a qualitative aspect that will consist of students’ personal reactions to various interventions intended to improve students’ reading comprehension and motivation to read. This study will attempt to provide an in-depth insight from the perspective of high school students who struggle to read and what they feel has helped them personally to increase their reading comprehension and motivation to read. The data gathered from this study will be useful for educators to consider when designing reading programs for at-risk high school students. The research questions were as follows:

1. What specific challenges do at-risk high school readers report they face that keeps them from comprehending written text at a proficient level. A “proficient level” will be indicated by satisfactory scores on their most recent standardized state-mandated reading test, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), as well as Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test scores that reflect that the student is reading at least on grade level.
2. What do at-risk high school readers view as ways in which the school can help them achieve reading comprehension proficiency?

3. Based upon the students' perceptions, do the at-risk high school students feel they are receiving adequate support to achieve reading comprehension proficiency?
4. How do the perceptions of the particular students included in this study differ from those of their teachers regarding their progress in reading comprehension and motivation to read?

Description of Participants

Twenty students in grade eleven who have been identified as struggling readers were invited to participate in interviews pertaining to this study. Seven students agreed to participate in the study. These students were identified as struggling readers by the district due to failing scores on their previous standardized state reading assessments and were placed in reading classes during the previous two school years, which were their ninth and tenth grade years. The students had been placed into developmental reading classes during those years in order to help them improve their scores on their next standardized state reading assessments. During those two years, they were exposed to a variety of effective reading comprehension strategies on a daily basis while in their reading classes as described in the literature review that include the following: think-alouds, group reading instruction, somebody-wanted-but-so, reciprocal teaching, it says-I say-and so. They were also permitted to spend time reading books of their own choosing during the time they were enrolled in the reading classes during their ninth and tenth grade years. Students' participation in this study was strictly voluntary.

The students' reading teacher also agreed to serve as a participant in this study. The teacher was selected because she has daily one-to-one interactions with the students and therefore has more opportunities to observe students' strengths and challenges. She has a Masters degree in English and is also working towards a Doctoral degree in English. She is in her fourth year of teaching in a public high school, but has had fifteen years of experience teaching developmental English at community colleges. She holds the appropriate teaching credentials for teaching high school English courses, but does not hold a Reading Specialist certificate nor does she have any specialized training in reading instruction. For the past two years her principal has required that she use the Read 180 reading program in her reading classroom. In addition to teaching reading classes, she also teaches a section of English I as well as English III Dual Credit.

Data Collection

Overall, the study utilized qualitative data that were collected using the critical ethnography methods of Carspecken. The main source of data for this study was gathered through student interviews. However, quantitative data was used in the form of Gates MacGinitie Reading Test scores and TAKS scores. Both the TAKS scores and Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test scores are archival data and were collected during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years. These scores are intended to serve as more demographic data to show trends of improvement in reading comprehension. During the students' ninth and tenth grade years, the instructor of the students' reading class used methods that have been proven to be effective in developing reading comprehension. These methods included the core methods described in the

review of the literature and are as follows: think alouds, group reading instruction, somebody-wanted-but-so, strategy instruction/reciprocal teaching, it says—I say—and so.

Semi-structured interviews with these 11th grade students were used. The purpose of these interviews was to understand from a student's perspective what they feel are challenges when reading. The interview protocol for these interviews has been included in Appendix A. The purpose of these interviews was to generate authentic responses from students that accurately reflect their opinions and experiences and discover what each student found to be personally helpful in assisting with his or her development in reading comprehension and what specifically motivated the students to read.

Students were interviewed during their school day during a class period that was convenient to the teacher, and much effort was taken to avoid pulling students from core-area classes. Additionally, district as well as campus permission was obtained prior to conducting this study. Each student interview lasted approximately 35 to 50 minutes each and was conducted in a classroom with only the interviewer and student present so students would feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and opinions on the various topics discussed. Each student who participated was also observed in his or her reading class in order to examine how the students' responses to the questions align to their performances in their classes as it pertains to reading assignments.

Based upon students' responses to questions during the interview, the students' reading teacher was also asked to participate in an interview regarding the student's reading comprehension. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teacher regarding each student who participated. The interviews occurred after the conclusion of the school day at the

convenience of the reading teacher and took place in her classroom with only the teacher and interviewer present. An interview protocol was used in the teacher interviews and is included in Appendix A.

In addition to the questions outlined in the interview protocol, questions specific to each individual student surfaced and were used in order to elicit more specific feedback from the students regarding topics that the students addressed. Such questions and specific responses were recorded in the transcriptions of the student interviews and were intended to disclose more specific information about challenges students face regarding reading comprehension, solutions to assist them with reading comprehension, and support students need to succeed academically in regards to reading comprehension will be generated based upon what the researcher specifically observes the student saying and doing in the classroom. In order to uncover the students' responses to the research questions, the five stages for critical qualitative research were utilized as follows: 1) compiling the primary record, 2) preliminary reconstructive analysis, 3) dialogical data generation, 4) discovering system relations, 5) system relations as explanations of findings (Carspecken, 1996, p. 43).

Stage 1: Compiling the Primary Record

During each observation, the researcher compiled sets of monological data by audio taping the discourse during the class interaction (Carspecken, 1996). At least one complete class period in which reading comprehension is utilized was observed regarding each student in effort to fully capture students' reactions. Afterwards, a transcript of the class discussion was written

and served as the starting point of the study and analysis of the students' reactions. Students' and instructor's comments during the lesson were written verbatim and composed the transcript.

Stage 2: Preliminary Reconstructive Analysis

During this stage, the researcher used the transcript recorded during instruction involving the observation of each student. This particular stage uncovered various meaning fields, validity reconstructions, and backgrounded and foregrounded meanings of statements made during the lesson involving the reading method (Carspecken, 1996). During this process, various themes began to emerge that informed the researcher of the students' reactions and assisted with uncovering themes pertaining to challenges, solutions, and support students need in the classroom in regards to reading comprehension and motivation to read.

Stage 3: Dialogical Data Generation

During this stage, the researcher engaged the subjects of the study in interviews and discussions regarding themes that the researcher had noticed based upon the information yielded by stages one and two. During this stage, Carspecken cautions researchers, "There are good reasons...for delaying dialogical data generation until a primary record has been developed and partially analyzed" (1996, p. 42). Due to the nature of this study, it is necessary to wait until the primary record has been recorded and analyzed in order to give the researcher ample opportunity to notice themes that have emerged during stages one and two that pertain to the research

questions. Dialogical data was generated based upon topics that emerge regarding each of the five reading methods used in this study.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this stage was to discover certain system relationships that emerged during the observations and interviews among the research subjects and the research question, which, in this case, pertains to reading comprehension and one's motivation to read in order to increase reading comprehension. This step was incredibly pertinent, especially in noticing students' motivation to read. Carspecken stated that it is "...absolutely crucial to gain a full understanding of qualitative research findings" (1996, p. 194). This may particularly reveal what Carspecken refers to as "cultural conditions of action" (1996, p. 190). He refers to cultural conditions of action as "those that resource and constrain through the volition of the actor" and influences the actor's concept of volition, which he describes as "free will" (1996, p. 190). Carspecken believes that volition depends on cultural structures to exist and that such structures are fundamental and a necessary resource for social action and that "actors are more likely to employ themes enjoying wide recognition by members of their group" (1996, p. 191). During this analysis, the researcher used data gathered in stages one, two, and three to discover these system relations. Carspecken outlines four primary conditions required to successfully validate the analysis:

1. *Prior fidelity to the validity requirements of stages 1-3:* Reconstructions of stages one through three must be complete before analysis commences.

2. *Match between researcher's comparative analysis and subject's commentary:*

Relationships must be found and the connection between the sites will correspond to certain experiences routine to the subjects of study.

3. *Match between researcher's reconstructions and those produced and published by other researchers:*

For example, if popular music happened to be an important part of one of the research subject's lives and seemed to be a partial explanation for why the student interpreted schooling as he did, then it would be necessary to explore that aspect to determine how the subject's interest affects his interpretation.

4. *Use of peer debriefers and member checks:* It is helpful to gain feedback from colleagues during this stage to check the analysis.

(Carspecken, 1996, p. 202)

Carspecken further states that one must "...strive for a fusion of cultural horizons between the group studied and the culture of the research community...being cognizant of different kinds and conditions of actions...will help to this end" (1996, p. 203). The analysis process will incorporate research subjects' culture and environmental conditions and concepts of interest, taking them into account when analyzing their relationships to the research questions.

For this particular study, archival quantitative data pertaining to the changes in the students' Gates MacGinitie Reading Tests and TAKS tests during the years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 were also collected and analyzed in order to trace improvement students demonstrated during those years while students were enrolled in the reading class and used methods such as think-alouds, group reading instruction, "somebody-wanted-but-so," reciprocal teaching, "it says-I say-and so" on a daily basis as well as independent reading. As a result of

analyzing the data generated through the interviews with students, teachers, and observations of students in the reading classes, the researcher was able to use the data to effectively explain findings that pertain to the research questions:

1. What specific challenges do at-risk high school readers report they face that keeps them from comprehending written text at a proficient level. A “proficient level” will be indicated by satisfactory scores on their most recent standardized state-mandated reading test, the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), as well as Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test scores that reflect that the student is reading at least on grade level.
2. What do at-risk high school readers view as ways in which the school can help them achieve reading comprehension proficiency?
3. Based upon the students’ perceptions, do the at-risk high school students feel they are receiving adequate support to achieve reading comprehension proficiency?
4. How do the perceptions of the particular students included in this study differ from those of their teachers regarding their progress in reading comprehension and motivation to read?

The need for effective developmental reading instruction is great at all levels of education. Currently, few established reading programs exist for high school students that are truly effective. Although standards for reading proficiency continue to rise, little opportunity exists for high school students to receive quality developmental reading instruction. Students will be entering a society in which their ability to comprehend written material is paramount to their success vocationally.

Therefore, reading instruction must be available for these students and must employ effective strategies that align with the standards set by the International Reading Association and the National Council for Teachers of English. Effective, high-quality teachers as defined by the International Reading Association standards must be recruited to teach these classes and be given the freedom to utilize strategies that are effective for their own classes, and not forced to adhere to an unwavering, ineffective curriculum. Instead, students must employ strategies to monitor their own learning and taught strategies to use when their reading comprehension suffers. As a result, students must be given the opportunity to be motivated to read. Researchers must also include the personal reactions of the struggling students themselves in order to uncover solutions to this issue. More research involving the students' personal reactions and voices regarding the issues surrounding reading comprehension and motivation is necessary in order to gain a full picture of the issue and solutions to the problems faced by struggling high school students.

Chapter IV – Results

This chapter presents the data gathered from the study and consists of both interviews with students who I instructed previously in reading as well as interviews with the teacher who currently instructs the students in reading and assisting them in continuing to build their reading comprehension skills. Descriptions of class observations of the students in their current reading classes are also included in this chapter. The interviews with the students took place at their current high school in a classroom that was not utilized by other teachers or students during the times of our interviews in order to keep students' responses confidential and also to allow students to speak freely and uninhibited by outside influences when responding to my questions. It is important to note that I had taught these students previously for two years, so a great deal of rapport had already been established between the students and me. Their current reading teacher reported that they were excited to come and speak with me, so it is important to note that the students were very willing to share their experiences.

In order to present this information in the most palatable format, I have begun with descriptions of each individual student interview as well as a description of the student and his or her demographic data. The purpose of this section is to portray as accurately as possible the type of learner the student is, and the unique qualities possessed by the student and issues with which the student deals in relation to reading comprehension and motivation to read.

Following the interviews of the students, I have included a description of the interviews with the current reading teacher of the students. The purpose of this section is to portray the teacher's observations of the students' progress in reading comprehension and their feedback pertaining to their observations of the students' motivation to read. By including both the

students' perspectives and the teachers' perspectives on these issues, I was able to compare and contrast these two viewpoints.

At the end of this chapter I included an analysis of the observations of the students during their reading classes, during their interviews, and the teacher interviews regarding the participating students. This section was presented from the perspective of a passive observer regarding what was taking place in the class and how the actions correlated or contradicted with the statements made by the students and teachers during the interviews.

Analysis of Student Interview with Sarah

Sarah is an 11th grade student who has made steady progress in her reading comprehension as evidenced through her TAKS scores and Gate-MacGinitie Reading Test scores. During her 8th grade year 2008-2009, she scored 1936 on her English/Language Arts TAKS test, which is well below passing minimum score of 2100. She then moved on to high school and was enrolled in the reading class. During her 9th grade year 2009-2010, Sarah passed her English/Language Arts TAKS test with a minimum score of 2100. During her 10th grade year 2010-2011, Sarah again passed her English/Language Arts TAKS test with a score of 2369, thus demonstrating steady progress in reading comprehension as evidenced on the state-mandated standardized test. In addition, her Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test scores demonstrated continued improvement. During her 8th grade year 2008-2009, scores indicated that she was reading at a 7th grade reading level. During her 9th grade year, scores indicated that she was reading at a 10th grade reading level. By the end of her 10th grade year, scores indicated that she was reading at a

“Post High School” reading level. Based upon her scores on both the TAKS and Gates tests, Sarah clearly has demonstrated improvement in reading comprehension.

During the interview, I asked Sarah questions that were designed to help me understand the level of difficulty she experiences comprehending written text. Her responses indicated that she felt like she could comprehend reading assignments fairly well. However, she also stated that she loses interest in her reading assignments and is not “quite into it.” She indicated that her class size is large and feels as though she gets “passed over.” She commented that she enjoyed the previous small-group setting of the reading class last year and enjoyed the small group discussions because she felt more like a part of the group. Last year, Sarah contributed a great deal to class discussions and enjoyed doing so. However, now she states that she feels intimidated by the large group setting and that the more vocal students get more attention. Sarah is a soft-spoken person and feels that her statements are disregarded in a larger group.

Throughout the interview, Sarah kept referring to the benefits of a small group setting and that she felt comfortable to participate in that setting. She mentioned that she does not feel motivated to read this year, even though she does complete her assignments. Sarah stated during the interview that due to the lack of this setting, it seems as though other students do not have the same goal and that they are not interested in the reading, so any discussions are also not engaging, so she does not feel the motivation to read. She also commented that she does not get to pick out her own books during the school day, which was an integral part of the previous reading class during the previous two years. Independent reading time was embedded into the reading curriculum last year, and Sarah indicated that she missed doing that. As a result, Sarah has not been reading as much this year, even though she says she loves to read. Last year, Sarah checked out many books from the classroom library and read at home often. When I asked her

why she does not read as much this year, she said that there is not a classroom library from which she can check out books. The only reading she does now is assigned reading, which she reports she is not “in to.” When I asked her about going to the school library, she responded that she did not have time between classes, she was not allowed to go during lunch, and also had a job, so it has made access to books difficult for her. She stated that it was sad because she actually does like to read. She also stated that the library does not have the types of books she likes and it is often difficult to find what she wants to read when she is in the library. With the classroom library, she stated that it was easier for her to find books that she was interested in because recommendations could be made or she felt she could ask questions about certain books to help her decide if she’d like to read it.

When I asked her about what she felt helped her make such significant gains in her reading comprehension during the previous years, Sarah responded, “...reading as a group and reading, like, different varieties of books. And you giving us assignments to do, but it’s like something that makes us go beyond what is written in the book. Like when we had to write explanations to the books...I felt like I could give more and it was like great.” Sarah is referring to an activity that was used often which involved group discussions over the books, but also entertained each student’s opinion and personal reactions to situations in the books. Students were guided to make connections between the situations presented in the book and situations presented in real life.

I also wanted to know more about the level of support Sarah is receiving in her other classes when reading assignments are difficult and what strategies teachers utilize to assist her when reading a difficult passage. She responded that in her content classes she has a co-teacher who takes her out of the large group setting for more individualized assistance, and she indicated

that this helps her quite a bit. She again stated that she feels left out of large group discussions and that the teacher does not have time for her, so the attention of the co-teacher helps. She indicated that she also feels less nervous when in a smaller setting and that she can open up more easily and that she will not be harshly judged by other students in the class. It is important to note that Sarah has a speech impediment, which could also be attributed to the fact that she feels more comfortable being in a smaller setting, which may account for the fact that she is able to open up more in a small group and participate and feel uninhibited.

Analysis of Student Interview with Ashley

Ashley is also an 11th grade student who I previously taught in my reading class for two years. During that time, she also demonstrated improvement in her reading comprehension abilities as evidenced on her English/Language Arts TAKS tests and Gates MacGinitie Reading Test scores. During her 8th grade year 2008-2009, her TAKS score was 2084, which was a failing score as 2100 is the minimum passing score. In 9th grade she was placed in a reading class. At the end of her 9th grade year 2009-2010, her TAKS score was 2109. When she took TAKS during her 10th grade year 2010-2011, she scored 2143, thus demonstrating continued improvement in her reading comprehension abilities as evidenced on the English/Language Arts TAKS test. Her scores on the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test also indicated improvement in reading comprehension. At the end of her 8th grade year 2008-2009, her score indicated she was reading at a 3rd grade reading level. At the end of her 9th grade year 2009-2010, she was reading at a 6th grade reading level. By the end of her 10th grade year 2010-2011, she was reading at a 9th

grade level. Although she was still reading at one reading level below her own grade level, she demonstrated marked improvement.

During the interview, I asked Ashley questions that were designed to help me understand the level of difficulty she experiences comprehending written text. She indicated that it depends on the class and stated that history was the easiest class for her in regards to reading assignments because she “knows more about it.” Much of the content is presented orally in the class, so she indicated that the background knowledge she receives makes the reading in the class easier for her. Her most difficult reading was text presented in her science class. She stated that the vocabulary was difficult for her which makes it difficult for her to understand what she is reading. In general, Ashley said she feels like she does “ok” with reading comprehension, but feels that sometimes it does not “flow” and her reading is “choppy” and sometimes can’t read “at a steady pace.” Ashley is referring to her reading fluency, which can affect reading comprehension.

In regards to Ashley’s continued improvement in reading comprehension, I asked her what she felt had helped her the most. She stated that being in a small class and getting more attention and participating in class discussions about the reading assignments had helped her the most. Last year Ashley had read books independently at home and in class and I was curious to find out if she was continuing to do so. Ashley indicated that she does not enjoy reading this year. She stated that it takes her longer to read a book than other people, and she has trouble getting finished at the same time as everyone else. Additionally, she stated she does not like the method used this year. Her class is using the Read 180 program. Ashley stated that each student reads his or her own book and everything is done independently. She does not like the fact that there is no discussion over her book. She also added that the books from which she must choose

are “boring” and they take her a long time to finish. During this part of the interview, Ashley began to sound frustrated with the situation. She added, “...if I’m gonna read something then I want to read it fast and get done with it but it never seems to do that because we always have to hurry up and finish our books and I don’t even like them, so it’s not fun. And the teacher doesn’t help us understand them.”

I was also interested in finding out what level of support Ashley has in her content classes in regards to reading assignments. Her responses indicated that she is not taught strategies. Instead, she has a co-teacher in her classes. Ashley indicated that when she is struggling with a reading assignment, the co-teacher takes her out of the classroom and tells her what the reading assignment is about and summarizes it for her and uses more familiar words. When I asked her about any vocabulary instruction in these classes, she said that she is not taught the vocabulary and that simpler words are used instead of helping her learn vocabulary. Ashley again indicated that her greatest difficulty with reading is that it takes her longer because she is presented with unfamiliar vocabulary.

Analysis of Student Interview with Andrea

Andrea is also an 11th grade student who I previously taught in my reading class for two years. During that time, she also demonstrated improvement in her reading comprehension abilities as evidenced on her English/Language Arts TAKS tests and Gates MacGinitie Reading Test scores. During her 8th grade year 2008-2009, Andrea scored 1163 on her TAKS test, well below the minimum passing score of 2100. When she went to 9th grade, she was placed in the reading class. During her 9th grade year 2009-2010, Andrea scored 2251, a marked improvement

from her previous score. During her 10th grade year 2010-2011, Andrea scored 2400, which is a commended score and a great accomplishment for her. Her Gates-MacGinitie scores also indicated continued improvement in her reading comprehension. During her 8th grade year 2008-2009, Andrea was reading at a 4th grade level. During her 9th grade year 2009-2010, Andrea was reading at a 7th grade level. Finally during her 10th grade year 2010-2011, Andrea was reading on-level at a 10th grade reading level. These scores demonstrate a major trend in her improvement in reading comprehension.

During the interview I asked Andrea to describe to me how well she felt she was comprehending her reading assignments. She indicated that reading was “pretty easy” for her and she had enjoyed the assigned reading that she had recently completed for her English class and felt that it was not difficult for her to read on her own. She commented that during the past few years, she has come to enjoy reading. When I asked her what she enjoys about reading, she stated that she’s been allowed to read books that she enjoys. She mentioned reading a series of books that she enjoyed in last year’s reading class and that reading what she enjoyed has motivated her to continue reading. She also indicated that being permitted to read books that were on her level when she was struggling helped her to continue to want to read and not give up.

Andrea also indicated that she uses several strategies when reading, one of which is re-reading portions of text. Something that was emphasized to students over the last two years has been to always pay attention to what they are reading, which sounds like a very simplistic instruction. However, Andrea has utilized that instruction to remain cognizant of what she is reading and monitor her own comprehension and take the proper steps when comprehension breaks down.

I was interested to know what Andrea's teachers do for her when she has difficulty comprehending text. She responded that she has a co-teacher in her content classes and when she has difficulty reading class material she is taken out into a smaller setting and the co-teacher reads the selection to her. I asked if any reading strategies were used by the co-teacher to help her read the material herself, and she said that they do not show her any reading strategies and simply read the passage to her or summarize it for her.

When I asked Andrea what she feels has helped her improve in reading comprehension, she stated that reading independently in the reading class helped her. She added, "...just me reading by myself, not a teacher reading it to me...it was me and not the teacher." I asked Andrea if she has been allowed to read anything in class this year that she had selected, and she responded that everything she has read this year in school has been assigned reading. However, she pointed out that luckily she has enjoyed most of the reading she has been assigned this year. She also stated having the opportunity to go to a smaller group when she needs it has helped because it reduces distractions that are present in the larger classes. She reported that she is able to concentrate better and that the teacher can help her when she needs it because she is not having to deal with distracting students.

Analysis of Student Interview with Teri

Teri is also an 11th grade student who I previously taught in my reading class for two years. During that time, she also demonstrated improvement in her reading comprehension abilities as evidenced on her English/Language Arts TAKS tests and Gates MacGinitie Reading Test scores. During her 8th grade year 2008-2009, she scored 2070 on her TAKS test, falling

below the minimum passing score of 2100. When she entered 9th grade, she was enrolled in the reading class. During her 9th grade year 2009-2010, she scored a 2100, barely achieving the minimum passing score. Her 10th grade year 2010-2011, Teri scored a 2251 on her TAKS test. Her Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test scores also indicate improvement in reading comprehension. Her 8th grade Gates score indicated she was at a 6th grade reading level. Her 9th grade Gates score indicated a 7th grade reading level. Her 10th grade Gates score indicated she was reading at a 9th grade reading level. Although this indicates she is not reading on-level, Teri has demonstrated continued improvement in reading comprehension.

During the interview I asked Teri to describe to me how well she felt she was comprehending her reading assignments. She said that classes with extensive amounts of reading involved were difficult for her and stated that it was mainly due to her lack of interest in the subject. She stated that "...it's just hard for me to get focused on something that just doesn't seem interesting." She referred to a book that had been assigned and stated that the book was not interesting, so she had difficulty when reading it. She added that she was able to answer basic questions about the book, but found it difficult to uncover "deeper meanings" because of her lack of interest in the book. Teri is referring to a practice that was routine in the previous reading class. I would select parts of the novel that had significance to other areas of life and I asked what was called the "so what" question. Students were required to look beyond the literal text and apply the "deeper meaning" as Teri calls it to other pertinent areas of life to help the students explore the author's theme. Teri is indicating that she has had difficulty doing this because she was not interested in the book. In other classes, such as science, Teri reported that the reading was easy because she was able to use her background knowledge on the subject to help her understand new material.

Teri also indicated that she uses special tinted glasses when reading. Teri has a condition called Irlens Syndrome in which one is sensitive to light and sometimes can see the words on the page easier when using tinted glasses or colored overlays. However, this is a physical issue and not necessarily due to the cognitive processes involved in reading and comprehension. Teri indicated that she is not using these glasses or overlays as often as before.

When I asked Teri what she does when she does not understand what she has read, she replied that she re-reads the passage and returns to the text. She stated that she usually understands text the first time she reads it, but not necessarily the “deeper meaning.” Her awareness of the “deeper meanings” indicates that she understands that more is involved when reading other than simply identifying basic details. She understands that she must develop inferences beyond the literal text, and this is indicated in her references to “deeper meanings.”

I was interested to know what sorts of strategies Teri has been shown to help her comprehend text. She indicated that in her content area classes she has a co-teacher who assists her and takes her to a small group when she has difficulty with the class material. When I asked her what strategies they use, Teri responded that they... “mark a certain part of a paragraph that actually goes to a question you’re going to answer. Summarize that little portion right there, and you’ll find the answer when you go back to your notes. They basically show you where in the story you will find the answer. But then, I don’t guess that really helps me while I’m actually reading. That’s more to help me get an answer, not really read for myself.” Teri’s response indicates that she understands the difference between simply regurgitating information and comprehending what she is reading, therefore demonstrating her awareness of a quality of a good reader.

When I asked Teri if she reads outside of school for pleasure, she indicated that she does and that she enjoys mysteries and romance. She stated that when she reads something that is of interest, she will read for extensive amounts of time. She stated that this has aided her in her reading comprehension because she is constantly practicing her reading as well as developing vocabulary through the books she reads independently. She was careful to repeat that she does have difficulty when the book is “boring” because she is less likely to pay attention to the “deeper meaning.”

Analysis of Student Interview with Steven

Steven is an 11th grade student who I previously taught in my reading class for two years. During that time, he also demonstrated improvement in his reading comprehension abilities as evidenced on his English/Language Arts TAKS tests and Gates MacGinitie Reading Test scores. During the 2008-2009 school year, Steven’s 8th grade TAKS score was 1882, which is quite low and far from the minimum passing score of 2100. When he entered 9th grade in 2009-2010, he was placed in the reading class. That year his TAKS score was 2100, exactly at the passing minimum score. During his 10th grade year 2010-2011, Steven scored 2368. His Gates MacGinitie Reading Test scores also indicated his improvement in his reading comprehension. In 8th grade he was reading at a 4th grade reading level. In 9th grade he was reading at a 7th grade reading level. In 10th grade he was reading at a 9th grade reading level. Although he still was reading below grade level, he demonstrated a steady trend in improvement during those years.

During the interview I asked Steven to describe to me how well he felt he was comprehending his reading assignments. He indicated that it usually takes him several times to

comprehend text before he “gets it.” He stated that the reason why he has difficulty is because the message tends to get jumbled up in his mind. He added that he can read the words, but it takes him a little longer to process what is conveyed through the words. Steven stated that he has the most difficulty when reading material for his history class because of the great amounts of factual information he must read and remember. In regards to his reading class and English class, Steven indicated that he does not have as much difficulty and that science and math classes were his best classes. Steven stated that he didn’t read much during his younger grades, but has recently been reading more and stated that since he has been reading more on his own, he has found that reading is becoming easier for him. He also stated that his mother has started requiring him to read at home with her and that this extra reading has helped him with his comprehension. He also indicated that he has started reading a book he really enjoys, The Hunger Games, and because he is interested in it he is now reading more on his own.

I asked Steven what his teachers do for him to help him comprehend reading material when he has difficulty. He stated that they give him hard copies of notes that he is expected to use the notes to complete worksheets over the reading material. When I asked if he was ever shown any strategies to use on his own to help him comprehend the reading material, he said that his teacher do not do anything like that. He stated that his greatest difficulty when it comes to reading is the time constraints. Steven indicated that he reads slower than his peers and that he could comprehend material better if he had more time.

Analysis of Student Interview with Crystal

Crystal is an 11th grade student who I previously taught in my reading class for two years. During that time, she also demonstrated improvement in her reading comprehension abilities as evidenced on her English/Language Arts TAKS tests and Gates MacGinitie Reading Test scores. During the 2008-2009 school year, her 8th grade year, she scored 1815 on her TAKS test, far from the passing minimum score of 2100. When she entered 9th grade, she was placed in the reading class. During her 9th grade year 2009-2010, she scored 2199 on her TAKS test. The following year 2010-2011, her 10th grade year, she scored 2228. These scores indicate a steady increase in her reading comprehension abilities. Additionally, her Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test scores indicate a steady increase in her reading comprehension abilities. During her 8th grade year 2008-2009, she was reading at a 3rd grade reading level. In 2009-2010, her 10th grade year, she was reading at a 4th grade reading level. During 2010-2011, her 10th grade year, she was reading at a 6th grade level. These scores also indicate a steady increase in Crystal's reading comprehension abilities.

During the interview I asked Crystal to describe to me how well she felt she was comprehending her reading assignments. She stated that she felt she was doing well. When I asked what has helped her the most this year with her reading assignments, she mentioned that she has a co-teacher in her content area classes. When I asked her what the co-teacher did that was so helpful, Crystal responded that the co-teacher pulls her out of the large group setting to read the material to her. Crystal also stated that her reading class was easy this year "...because you don't really have to do anything." Crystal is in a reading class this year that uses the reading program Read 180 and Crystal again stated that the class "...is not really hard and you don't have to do very much." Crystal also indicated that the smaller groups are more beneficial to her

than the larger groups and stated "...I work harder when I'm in small groups than when I'm with the teacher."

When I asked Crystal what she thought helped her improve in reading comprehension during the past few years, she stated it was because she was working harder than she did before. When I asked her what had caused her to work harder, she stated that it was because she received attention in the small reading class setting and was made to engage in reading activities. She also indicated that hearing other students' perspectives on class reading assignments helped her "...because they would talk about it in their way...and you listen to what they're saying and they're talking about the story and it helps you know more when you listen." Crystal is referring to class discussion activities in which students would frequently engage in and examine situations from the points of views of various characters in the story. When I asked Crystal what her other teachers do to help her comprehend difficult reading passages, she could not recall any reading strategies or describe any reading strategies. She stated that they help her by explaining the reading material in easy words and summarizing it for her, but usually they give her the answer if she can't answer a comprehension question on her own.

Based upon Crystal's responses, she feels that reading and her other school subjects are easy. However, it appears that Crystal feels that it is easy because she is not experiencing challenges. When she is too challenged, it seems as though Crystal is given the answer rather than shown strategies to comprehend difficult reading material, thus perhaps giving her a false sense of personal success in reading comprehension. She stated that her reading improved during the past years because she was made to read on her own along with support strategies. However, from Crystal's responses it appears that she is no longer being challenged and supported in that

way and “answers” are given to her, thus eliminating the personal challenges essential for developing effective reading comprehension skills.

Analysis of Student Interview with Jason

Jason is an 11th grade student who I previously taught in my reading class for two years. During that time, he also demonstrated improvement in his reading comprehension abilities as evidenced on his English/Language Arts TAKS tests and Gates MacGinitie Reading Test scores. In 2008-2009, his 8th grade year, Jason scored 2070 on his TAKS test, which is below the minimum passing standard of 2100. When he entered 9th grade, Jason was placed in the reading class. During his 9th grade year, Jason scored 2303 on his TAKS test. He continued to improve into his 10th grade year and scored 2341, thus evidencing a trend of improvement in his reading comprehension.

He also made significant gains in reading comprehension based upon his Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test scores. During his 8th grade year he was reading at a 4th grade reading level. During his 9th grade year he was reading at a 7th grade reading level. His 10th grade year Jason finally was reading on grade level and reading at a 10th grade reading level. His Gates scores further indicate a trend of improvement in his reading comprehension abilities.

Jason is also a student with autism and experiences learning difficulties related to autism. He can become easily distracted or upset and has been prone to outbursts of rage. He is monitored through a program at the school that utilizes specially-trained personnel to effectively assist in keeping Jason in a regular education classroom so he can experience his education in the least restrictive environment. Therefore, Jason does require specialized attention and also is

placed on a behavior intervention plan which is to be implemented by all school personnel who work with Jason, including all teachers and principals. Jason has often refused to complete work for teachers who he did not like or teachers who he perceived to not like him. However, Jason has proven to be a hard worker and compliant when he feels that his teachers do like him.

During the interview, Jason was very excited to talk to me about his reading experiences. He also stated that he was glad to be pulled from his earlier class to participate in the interview because he did not like the class and used inappropriate language to describe his feelings about the class. I briefly reminded him about the appropriate way in which to express his feelings and he was compliant with this directive prior to the interview. Because I have known Jason for two years and have developed rapport with him, I felt it was appropriate for me to remind him of appropriate behavior and language, as it is how he has been used to interacting with me in the past. He was compliant with the directive, did not get upset, and it did not hinder him from expressing his thoughts during the interview.

When I asked Jason how well he felt he was doing in comprehending his reading assignments in his classes, he responded that it depended upon the class. He expressed that word problems in his math models class were difficult for him because he was not sure how to calculate the problems. He stated that his history class was very easy for him because his co-teacher gives him the right answers after he tries to find them on his own. In regards to reading class, he had some very strong opinions about a book his class had just finished reading and discussed it at length, providing his observations about the main character and his actions and his opinions of the character's decisions. Jason said the book was fairly easy for him to read independently, and his statements and personal observations about the book lead me to believe that he did read at least most of it himself. The way in which Jason described his opinions was

similar to the way he would discuss books he had read independently in the reading class during the previous two years. He commented that he had found the book to be strange and stated that "...sometimes strange books can actually be kinda cool to read...like the books I read in your class last year...I like twisted books, it's like you're on a big giant slide and you're going...and it's like so long and it takes you a way long time and then finally you reach the bottom and I'm like, 'Well, that was interesting.'" It is important to note that Jason read extensively during the previous two years. He read mostly fantasy books or books that involve mythology and read voraciously. He also read many books independently and would ask to take books home, only to come back a few days later to tell me all about it and check out another one.

When I asked Jason what he felt had helped him improve his reading comprehension, he said it was because he actually wanted to read and that he was understood in the class and was not rushed when reading. He also referred to class discussions about books we had read as a class and said that he liked that he could read a book and see it from his own perspective and then hear another student talk about it from their own perspective. He said it made him realize that just because he sees things differently does not mean that he is wrong. When reading mandatory selections in which he did not get a choice in what to read, Jason reported that he had to remember to slow down and try his best. This is a behavior that was addressed with Jason in years past. Previously he would get upset when he had to do something he did not want to do. As a result, he would not complete the assignment and his grade would suffer. Throughout the two years, I told Jason that I just wanted him to attempt the reading assignment. When he focused on trying, he performed better because he was not preoccupied with whether or not he was getting questions right or wrong. All he had to do was try. Now he appears to understand that he will be

successful when he tries. Although this may seem like a simplistic concept, it was a behavior that took much time and effort to instill in Jason. As a result, he experienced success.

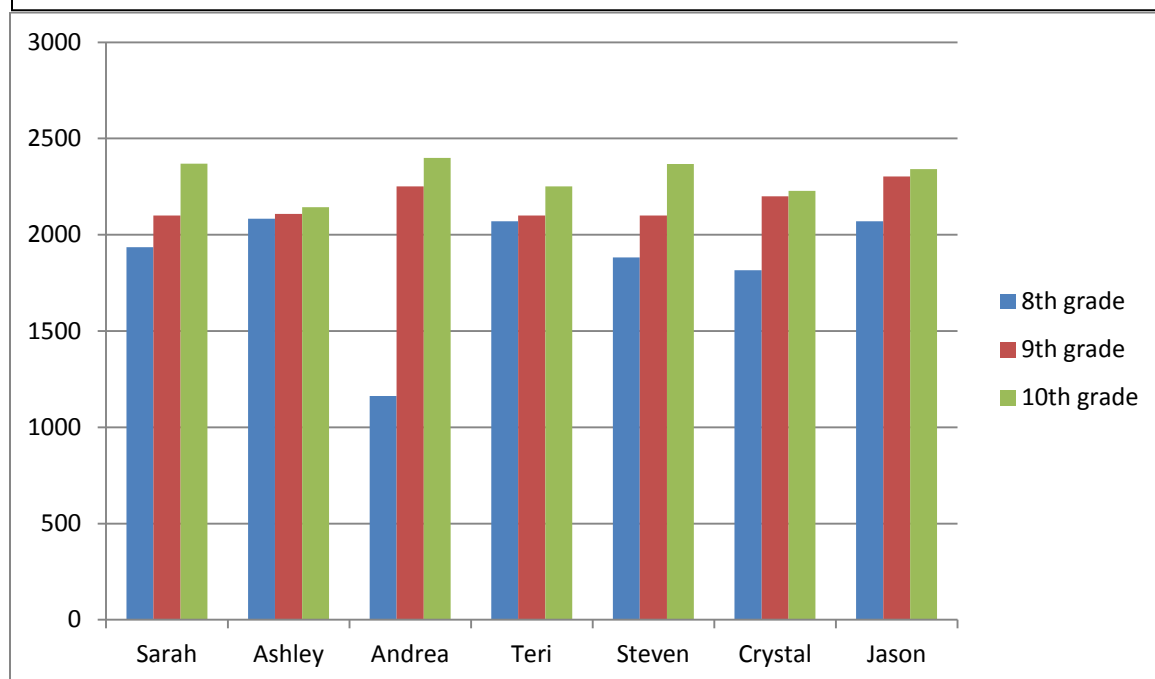
Jason also stated that he found it to be helpful when he was shown how to arrive at answers rather than told how to complete an assignment. Jason is referring to a strategy used in previous years, the “think-aloud.” This was commonly used in his reading class during the past two years. A journal response question would be posed to the class and they would respond to it independently. Then volunteers would read their responses and explain how they arrived at their conclusions based upon the actions and statements of the characters in the story. This was an activity in which Jason would participate in eagerly because he was able to share his perspectives on various issues in the story.

Jason also indicated that he often visualized what he was reading. He stated that he has a “lucrative imagination” and that he felt he could literally see everything in the book as if it happened in real life. Jason is referring to a strategy that was used in class during the previous two years in which students were encouraged to make the book a “movie in their mind.” This activity was done often and students would describe in detail the way they visualized the characters and settings and often students would draw the events as they viewed them.

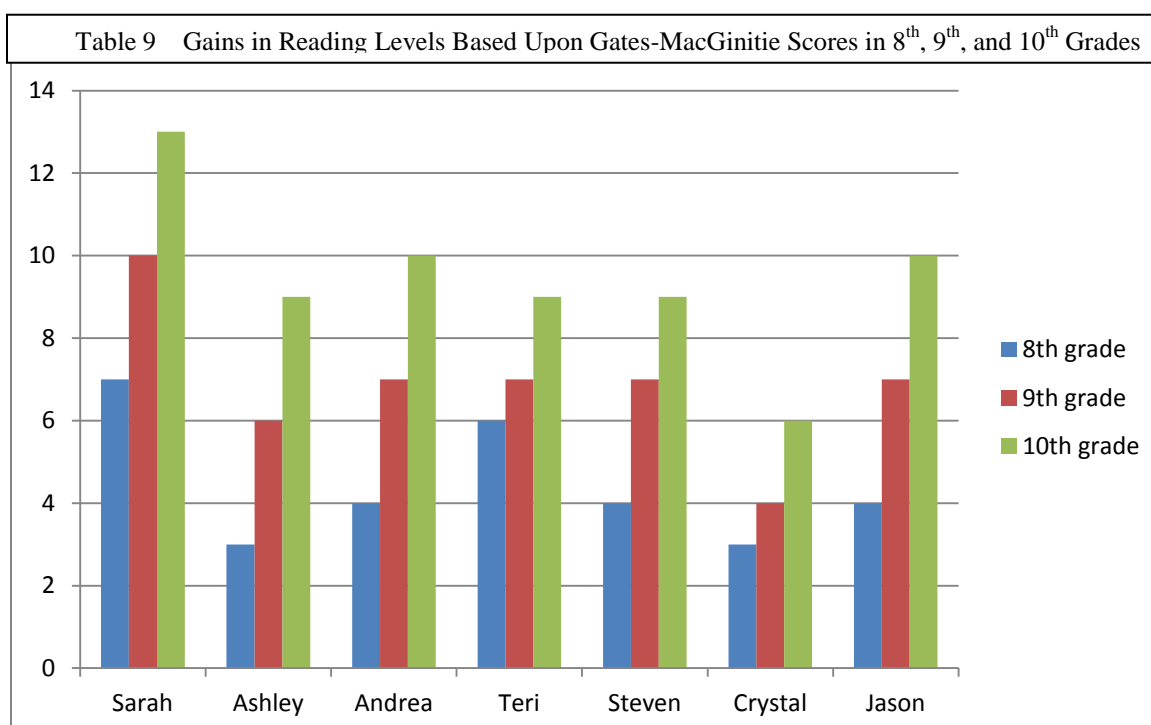
Analysis of Student Interviews

It is important to note that each of the students who participated in the study made significant gains in their English/Language Arts TAKS scores and Gate-MacGinitie Reading Test scores. The trends in their improvement can be represented in the graphs below:

Table 8

Gains in ELA TAKS Scores in 8th, 9th, and 10th Grades

Note: A score of 2100 is the passing score.



Classroom Observations

The purpose of including observations of these students in their classes was to observe how well they were functioning in the classroom setting, especially when reading assignments were involved. I chose to specifically observe them in their reading classes because the purpose of the reading class is to provide support for struggling readers. By observing them in a class specifically intended to assist them in developing reading skills, I expected that I would gain a better understanding as to how these needs are being met through this specialized class.

I observed the class on two occasions for a time period of fifty minutes each, which is the duration of the class period. On both occasions, each of the seven students who are included in this study was present. Three other students were also in the class, which brought the total

number of students in both class sessions to ten. My goal was to gather information to present an accurate depiction of the level of assistance these students are receiving in this specialized class and how students are responding to it. As I observed the classes, I was permitted to record the verbal interactions on an audio recorder while I took field notes on the activities that took place as well as student and teacher interactions and behaviors. The data from the audio recorder was then transcribed into written documents and field notes including student and teacher interactions and behaviors were included in the transcribed documents. In order to uncover themes during the observations, I used the transcribed documents and simply read through them several times before making any attempts to generate themes. After I had read the transcriptions at least three times each, I began to notice patterns that appeared significant. I coded them on my transcription pages and used abbreviations after each statement that pertained to each theme. After I had completed this process of transcribing the data, I observed seven recurring themes throughout the observations and used the following abbreviations in my transcriptions in which to identify them:

1. Teacher attempts to control classroom (TC= “teacher control”)
2. Student attempts to avoid classroom engagement (AE= “avoid engagement”)
3. Student attempts to gain teacher’s approval (TA= “teacher approval”)
4. Student attempts to gain teacher’s attention (GA= “gain teacher’s attention”)
5. Teacher attempts to correct students’ mistakes (CM= “correct mistakes”)
6. Student self-initiated attempts to eliminate distractions (ED= “eliminate distractions”)
7. Student attempts to seek clarification (SC= “seek clarification”).

Description of Classroom Observation I

As the bell rang, several students ran into the classroom at the last minute, giggling and laughing. The teacher ignored them and the three students leisurely took their seats at a bank of classroom computers. The teacher began the class by telling the students that they would be completing a reading activity together and that they would be reading it out loud. Students grumbled at the mention of this assignment and the teacher appointed a student to begin reading aloud. While the student was reading, several other students drifted over to the classroom computers and joined the group of boys who had been tardy to the class. They turned on their computers and began a conversation while the teacher continued to work with a small group of students who were engaged in the reading assignment. It is not clear if the boys at the computers had permission to be there, as none of them had asked permission and it did not appear that they were working on any assignments using the computers. Prior to the classroom observation, the teacher had told me that her class uses a reading program called Read 180. She described it as a program with several components that included independent reading and activities that were computer-based as well as small groups led by the teacher. No instructions were given to the boys at the computers as to what they should be accomplishing at the computers and more students seemed to drift over to the computers as they appeared to lose interest in the reading activity. Therefore, it was difficult to discern exactly what the students in the class were expected to accomplish during this class period.

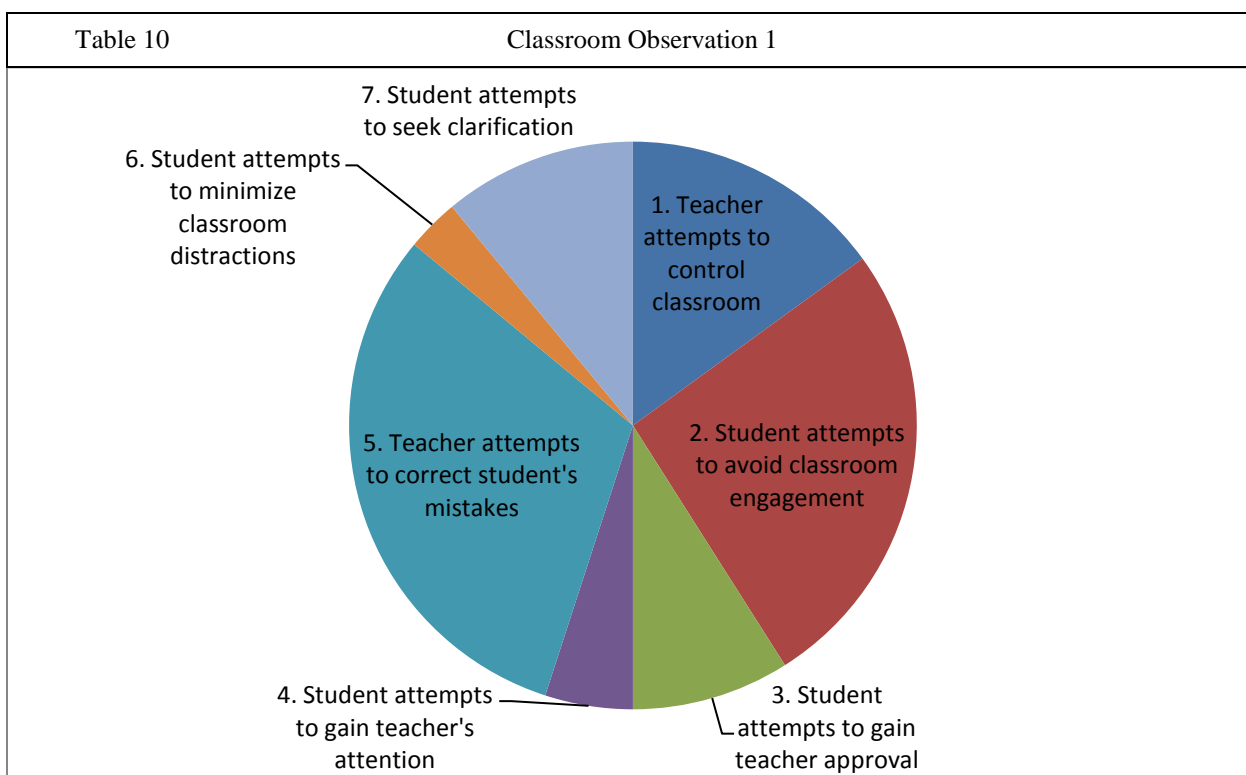
The group of students who stayed with the teacher was involved in a reading assignment in which the students read a passage aloud. When the students mispronounced a word, the teacher often interjected and corrected them. I observed that no time was given to the students to allow them to self-correct the mispronounced words. The teacher also stopped the students

frequently to summarize what they had read and ask basic comprehension questions. However, wait time for the students' responses was minimal and the teacher often answered her own questions.

During this activity, it appeared that some of the students at the computers had begun a type of reading assignment independently and were focused on completing those activities. However, the group of three boys who had arrived late was not engaged in any academic activity and played games on the Internet. At one point a student asked permission to go to the restroom because his pen had broken and was leaking ink. His request was denied and he sat idle for most of the class period, attempting to clean his hands of the ink. Another student had a technical problem with the computer program with which he was using to complete a reading assignment. The student attempted to gain the teacher's assistance and she referred him to another student to assist with the problem. However, it appeared that the problem was never rectified and the student joined the group of the three off-task boys. Throughout the class period, the group of boys was very disruptive and remained off-task. Several times some of the other students attempted to silence the boys' disruptions. The teacher also attempted to correct their behavior by telling them to be quiet, but this directive did not silence the boys' disruptions.

As I coded the transcription, I tallied up the number of times I observed the seven recurring themes throughout the first class session. I noticed that there were twenty attempts by the teacher to control the classroom environment and students' behavior, thirty-four instances of students' attempts to avoid classroom engagement, twelve student attempts to gain the teacher's approval in relation to an academic task, seven attempts to gain the teacher's attention, forty attempts by the teacher to correct students' mistakes in relation to an academic task, four instances in which other students initiated attempts to minimize distractions in the classroom,

and fourteen attempts by students to seek clarification in relation to an academic task. These occurrences can also be observed using the simple chart below:



Description of Classroom Observation 2

The second observation was very similar to the first observation. The same students who had been tardy the previous day were tardy again during the second observation. The teacher again ignored them and the three students sat again at the bank of classroom computers. The teacher began the class by telling the students that they would be completing a reading activity together and that they would be reading it out loud and that no computers were to be used during today's class. The teacher had all students sit in the desks in the center of the classroom and told the students to turn to page 108 in their books. Some students turned to the assigned page and others did not. The teacher appointed a student to read aloud. While the student was reading, several students drifted over to the classroom computers even though the teacher had said they were not to use them today. The boys who moved to the computers were not addressed or told to return to the group. Like yesterday, they turned on their computers and began a conversation while the teacher continued to work with the group of students who were engaged in the reading assignment.

The group of students who stayed with the teacher was involved in a reading assignment in which the students read a passage aloud, similar to the way in which they proceeded in the first observation. When the students mispronounced a word, the teacher often interjected and corrected them. I again observed that no time was given to the students to allow them to self-correct the mispronounced words. While reading, the teacher often stopped the students to summarize what they had read and ask basic comprehension questions. Wait time for the students' responses was again minimal and the teacher, as in the previous observation, often answered her own questions.

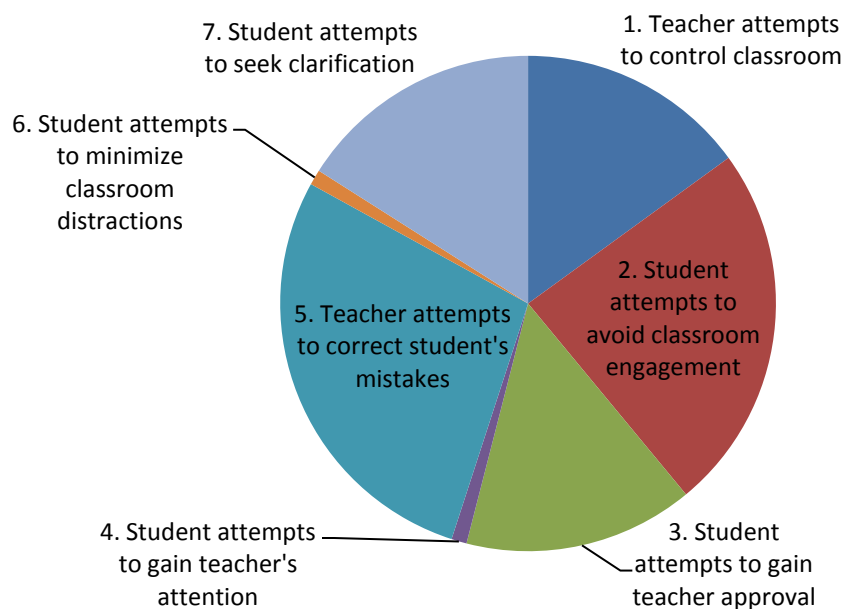
During this activity, the group of boys who had arrived late was again not engaged in any academic activity and played games on the Internet. At one point a student left the classroom without requesting permission. When the teacher asked where the student had gone and students told her he had gone to the restroom, she did not seem upset that he had left the classroom without permission. Like the previous observation, the group of boys at the computers was very disruptive and remained off-task during the class period. Again, some of the other students attempted to silence the boys' disruptions and the teacher also attempted to correct their behavior by telling them to be quiet, but this directive still did not silence the boys' disruptions. As

As I coded the transcription, I tallied up the number of times I observed the seven recurring themes throughout the second class session. I noticed that there were nineteen attempts by the teacher to control the classroom environment and students' behavior, twenty-nine instances of students' attempts to avoid classroom engagement, nineteen student attempts to gain the teacher's approval in relation to an academic task, two attempts to gain the teacher's attention, thirty-three attempts by the teacher to correct students' mistakes in relation to an academic task, one instance in which other students initiated attempts to minimize distractions in the classroom, and twenty attempts by students to seek clarification in relation to an academic task. These occurrences can also be observed using the simple chart below:

Table 11

Classroom Observation 2

Classroom Observation 2



Analysis of Classroom Observations

As stated previously, my purpose in observing the reading class was to gain an accurate depiction of the type of assistance students with reading difficulties are receiving in a class specifically designed to address reading difficulties. During both observations, it was clear that student behavior and classroom management could possibly affect the quality of assistance students were receiving in building reading comprehension skills. During a significant portion of the class periods, the teacher had to deal with disruptive and off-task students which took time away from instruction and interfered with the flow of instruction. Additionally, I observed three

students who did not complete any assignments or engage in any of the classroom activities during the two observations and instead talked to one another or played games on the Internet while disrupting other students. Several times, other students took it upon themselves to silence the other students' disruptions, thus evidencing the fact that the students were interfering with their own progress on the reading assignments and their concentration.

Because the teacher had to address the off-task students, the flow of instruction was disrupted for the rest of the students. Therefore, when the teacher returned to instructing the students, she seemed a bit distracted and irritability grew. At times, it seemed that her irritation with the off-task students manifested itself in her instruction with the other students. For example, the teacher seemed to have little patience with the students when they were answering the questions regarding the reading or when they mispronounced words. She would often correct the students immediately when a word was mispronounced, thus eliminating the opportunity for the students to self-correct these mistakes. Additionally, her instruction seemed rushed and impatient, especially after correcting off-task students, and therefore little wait time was afforded students when responding to questions and the teacher would often answer the questions herself if the student either required more time to answer or supplied an incorrect answer.

When I interviewed students, many of them had said that it helps them if they are given more time to complete a reading assignment or respond to questions. However, in this situation I observed that additional time is not afforded to these students and that they are often rushed, thus raising the question of whether the class is meeting their needs in developing their reading comprehension. During the student interviews, Crystal had commented that the class was easy and she did not really have to do much. Her comments in regards to the class appear to be consistent with what I observed. However, without the element of personal challenge, I am

uncertain as to how much growth in the area of reading comprehension Crystal and her classmates will experience this year.

Teacher Interviews

After conducting interviews with the students and observing them in a classroom setting, I was interested to find out from their teacher what her perception was regarding the students' reading comprehension and motivation to read. Therefore, I conducted interviews with the reading teacher in order to gain information from her perspective as to how the students are progressing in these areas and compare it with how the students are progressing in these areas while also comparing these statements and observations to what I had observed while teaching them for two years prior to this study.

Teacher Interview Regarding Ashley

When interviewing the teacher, I asked her how well Ashley seemed to comprehend her reading assignments. The teacher responded that it was difficult for her to tell because Ashley had discipline issues. She reported that Ashley would rather text on her phone or talk to other students than engage in the class activities. The teacher reported that she has spoken to Ashley's other content teachers, and one reported that she too is uncertain of Ashley's reading abilities because she does not complete work in class. The teacher also used the word "manipulative" to describe Ashley. When I asked the teacher what she meant by this, she responded that she tries many different tactics to avoid completing independent work and states that the work is too hard

and asks the teacher for help. This brings into question whether Ashley is actually trying to avoid the assignment and be “manipulative” as the teacher is describing her or whether Ashley is actually experiencing difficulty and is simply requesting assistance. In her interview, Ashley explained that sometimes she has difficulty reading fluently and that the meaning of what she is reading is lost due to the fact that her reading does not “flow.” What the teacher may perceive as avoidance of the task may actually be due to frustration on Ashley’s part because she is experiencing difficulty and requires assistance. The teacher explained that much of the reading program she uses in her class requires students to work independently. In her interview, Ashley expressed that she finds it most helpful to have a class discussion over the topic because it provides her a foundation with which she can frame her understanding of the subsequent passages. In a classroom that employs much independent work, it seems natural that Ashley would experience frustration and lack of effort if she feels that she is not given assistance.

In regards to motivation, the teacher explained that when she does work with Ashley and addresses her questions, Ashley does put forth more effort and works harder. This is consistent with Ashley’s statements in her interview. The teacher even stated that Ashley learns better when she is able to ask questions. This statement is consistent not only with Ashley’s statements in her interview, but also with what I observed in the classroom observations. Despite the many disruptions from other students, Ashley was mostly engaged in the class activity when the teacher was working with her and not requiring her to complete all assignments independently. During the observation, Ashley asked questions and sought clarification and participated in the reading assignment.

When I asked the teacher what role the school can play in assisting her with students like Ashley who have reading difficulties, the teacher stated that creating a small group setting in

which she can work with the students will be the most effective way to assist those students and stated that the school is already doing that. However, she pointed out that nobody can do anything about the students' attitudes. As she continued to speak about this issue, the teacher seemed unaware of anything she could do differently in the classroom to ensure a more suitable learning environment for her students that would reduce off-task behavior, such as clear objectives for the day's activities, clear expectations for student behavior, reinforcing desired and appropriate behavior, and effectively addressing and eliminating off-task behavior. When I asked her about these issues, the teacher felt that she was already addressing these problems effectively, which was contrary to what I had observed during the classroom observations as these issues very clearly had adverse effects upon the students' concentration. In addition, the students who were off-task remained off-task for the duration of the classes and therefore did not receive adequate reading instruction for at least those two days during which I observed them. According to the teacher, the students are the ones responsible for the disorganization of the classroom and she did not seem aware of any feasible way to rectify the problems. Therefore, it would seem advisable for teachers who find themselves in situations in which they must teach challenging students to be assisted by the school's administration in finding solutions to address such issues so they do not adversely affect the quality of instruction and consequently the students' learning.

Teacher Interview Regarding Sarah

During my interview with the teacher in regards to Sarah, the teacher seemed unaware of Sarah's reading comprehension abilities. She stated that she "guessed" that she was at a 7th or 8th

grade reading level. When I asked her how she arrived at that conclusion, she stated that it was just an estimate because Sarah is such a quiet student and does not speak up in class, but performs satisfactorily on reading comprehension assignments. When I asked if she was aware that Sarah was actually reading at a post-high school reading level based upon last year's Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test, she seemed surprised, but then stated that "she could see how that might be true." When I asked her about what she had observed in regards to Sarah's motivation to read, the teacher seemed to not have any idea as to her level of motivation. I asked if she had checked out any books, but the teacher said that she does not allow the students to check out books because they are irresponsible with them. This is inconsistent with what I experienced last year with these students. Most students voluntarily checked out books and returned them in good condition and read independently. Sarah's statements during her interview are consistent with what I was told by the teacher regarding checking out books. The teacher seemed surprised when I told her that Sarah has been an avid reader in the past and did not seem to view the option of checking out self-selected books as a motivational factor in encouraging students to read. The teacher admitted during the interview that she thinks Sarah is doing "just fine" with reading comprehension and her motivation to read because she does her work and is not a discipline issue. Based upon this interview, Sarah's interview, and what I have observed while teaching Sarah for the past two years, it appears that the teacher is unaware of Sarah's specific needs or motivational factors due to the fact that Sarah is not a discipline issue. Beyond this brief amount of information, I could not elicit further feedback from the teacher regarding Sarah.

Teacher Interview Regarding Andrea

During my interview with the teacher in regards to Andrea, the teacher seemed unaware of Andrea's reading comprehension abilities. As she did in regards to Sarah, the teacher stated that she "guessed" that she was at a 7th or 8th grade reading level. Again, when I asked her how she arrived at that conclusion, she stated again that it was just an estimate because Andrea does not have discipline issues and performs satisfactorily on reading comprehension assignments. When I asked her about what she had observed in regards to Andrea's motivation to read, the teacher seemed to not have any idea as to her level of motivation. As I asked during my interview regarding Sarah, I asked if Andrea had checked out any books, and the teacher again stated that she does not allow the students to check out books because they are irresponsible with them. Again, this is inconsistent with what I experienced last year with these students as the students voluntarily checked out books and returned them in good condition and read independently. Andrea's statements during her interview are consistent with what I was told by the teacher regarding checking out books. The teacher again seemed surprised when I told her that Andrea has been an avid reader in the past and did not seem to view the option of checking out self-selected books as a motivational factor in encouraging students to read. I explained that Andrea had enjoyed reading a specific series of books last year and that she read voraciously. The teacher again stated that she thinks Andrea is doing ok with reading comprehension and her motivation to read because she does her work and is not a discipline issue. Based upon this interview, Andrea's interview, and what I have observed while teaching Andrea for the past two years, it appears that the teacher is unaware of Andrea's specific needs or motivational factors due to the fact that Andrea is not a discipline issue. As with the interview regarding Sarah, I could not elicit further feedback from the teacher regarding Andrea because the teacher said that

Andrea always is compliant with what is requested of her, completes work, and is not a discipline issue.

Teacher Interview Regarding Teri

When interviewing the teacher regarding Teri's reading comprehension abilities and motivation to read, the teacher stated that due to the fact that Teri sometimes uses tinted glasses, the reason for any difficulties in reading lie in the fact that she has "bad eyes." The teacher was unaware that the reason for these tinted glasses is due to Irlens Syndrome. Additionally, the teacher was unaware that Teri has any other reading difficulties and attributed all problems to visual issues. Therefore, the teacher said that she can't do anything to help Teri because her problems are all visual and she can't do anything about that. However, when I mentioned that Teri also is a student with dyslexia, the teacher said she was unaware of that fact and that nobody had told her about it. However, when I spoke to the dyslexia specialist who oversees the monitoring and distribution of accommodations of all students with dyslexia at the school, the specialist stated that all teachers had signed an accommodations sheet that acknowledges each teacher's receipt of the accommodations and that they are expected to implement them. When speaking with the specialist, I did not mention the name of the teacher, but merely asked as a general inquiry. When the teacher did look through the accommodations she had received for her students, she did find Teri's accommodations and notification that she was a student with dyslexia.

Based upon these events, it appears that the teacher is unaware of Teri's needs and factors that motivate her to read in addition to her specific needs and interventions as required under

Section 504. Therefore, it appears that Teri has most likely not been receiving the appropriate instruction in reading as her accommodations have not been implemented in the reading class.

Teacher Interview Regarding Steven

As with the previous students, I asked the teacher to comment on Steven's reading comprehension abilities and his motivation to read. She stated that Steven sometimes stumbles over words when he reads aloud but that she helps him by correcting his mispronunciations. This is consistent with what I observed during the classroom observations. When I asked her how she has seen this strategy help Steven, she stated that it helps the oral reading assignments "go quicker." Although this may help speed up the oral reading, I asked her more specifically how she has seen this intervention benefit Steven. She said she did not know if it was helping or not. When I asked her if Steven was able to recognize the same words in other contexts, she said she did not know that either. She then commented on the fact that Steven now pauses when he comes to a word he does not know so that she can pronounce it for him. I asked her if she feels that this will help him when he reads independently, and she said most likely that it would not. When I asked what she planned to do to assist Steven in reading text independently, she said she puts him on the computer-based portion of the Read 180 program. Based upon her responses, she seemed to be unaware of any effective interventions to assist Steven when reading independently, nor was she aware of whether the Read 180 computer-based program was assisting him with his reading comprehension. During his interview, Steven had mentioned that he enjoyed reading The Hunger Games at home independently. However, when I asked her about her perception of Steven's motivation to read, did not know of any books he was interested in or

what genres he enjoyed. This seems to suggest that the teacher is unaware of any motivational factors in encouraging Steven to read.

Teacher Interview Regarding Crystal

As with the previous students, I asked the teacher to comment on Crystal's reading comprehension abilities and his motivation to read. She stated that reading is difficult for Crystal, so she reads almost everything with Crystal. In her interview, Crystal stated that the reading class was "easy" and that she didn't "have to really do anything." These statements seem consistent with what I observed during the class observations and with what the teacher has stated. During both observations, Crystal was pulled aside and words were pronounced for her when she did not immediately know them or pronounce them accurately. Additionally, answers were supplied for Crystal when she did not know the answer. Situations such as these may be leading Crystal to feel that reading is "easy." However, since she is not given opportunities to figure out answers or reading assignments without the answers immediately supplied for her or reading assignments immediately summarized for her, Crystal may not have an accurate understanding of her abilities in reading comprehension. During her interview, Crystal commented that she made gains in her reading comprehension and motivation to read because she was required to work and try to figure out answers on her own. However, since she is not afforded such opportunities in her reading class, it remains uncertain as to how much progress she will demonstrate in her ability to comprehend what she is reading.

Teacher Interview Regarding Jason

When I approached the teacher in regards to Jason's abilities in reading comprehension and motivation to read, she said that he often does not want to participate if he does not like what he is assigned to read. She stated that it is a struggle to get him to start reading. This is consistent with what I have observed with Jason in the past. However, based upon my experience teaching him for the past two years, I found that if he is given time to "cool down" when he is upset, he will ask for the assignment and complete it. In regards to his reading comprehension, she stated that she does not know his reading level because he refuses to complete assignments or reading selections. When I asked if she has ever observed him reading an unassigned book or knew if he read any books on his own outside of class, she mentioned that he often tries to bring in books to read that are not from the assigned reading list, so she does not allow him to read them. She said that when she makes him put them away, he sits at his desk angrily and will not engage in any classroom assignments.

She also mentioned that this behavior is "typical" for a student such as Jason because of his unique difficulties pertaining to autism and often has to request the personnel who monitor Jason to attend to him. I explained to her that during the past two years, Jason had read constantly and was very interested in reading science fiction and fantasy-genre novels. He was also more willing to try assigned novels when he knew that he would also be given time to read books of his own choosing. However, she said she did not allow unassigned books to be read in her classroom because they were not a part of her curriculum. Based upon the response, it appears that the teacher does not understand the value of allowing students variety in what they read in order to engage them in reading and therefore continue to develop their reading skills as they continuously read.

Analysis of Interviews and Observations: Common Themes

Throughout the student and teacher interviews and observations, common themes emerged. One such theme was the students' lack of interest in reading materials to which they were exposed hindered their motivation to read. Students described a number of issues that they felt hindered them from comprehending text and consequently reduced their motivation to read. Many students cited the fact that they lacked interest in the reading material and this lack of interest affected their motivation to read. Students explained that although they could often decode text, they often missed the depth of the reading selection due to the fact that they were disinterested in the selection itself. This suggests a direct connection between a student's motivation to read and the student's depth of comprehension. Most students stated that they could answer basic questions regarding reading material, but when they were not interested and engaged in the reading assignment, the depth of the piece was lost.

Another theme that emerged was the students' desire to read self-selected books. By reading self-selected books, motivation to read increased. In previous years, the students included in this study had been given time in class for independent reading. During this time, students were to select a book that was of specific interest to them. Students who had difficulty in selecting a book for independent reading time were assisted in finding a book that appealed to them. However, the students stated that they were no longer given time in class to read independently-selected books and the teacher commented that she does not allow them to choose which books to read in class. Several students stated that the reason why they felt they had developed and improved their reading comprehension skills during the previous years was due to the fact that they were given time to read books in class that were of personal interest and thus motivated them to read because they were provided positive reading experiences. This again suggests a

connection between reading comprehension and motivation. The more the students read, the more they felt they improved. Several students stated that they had been accustomed to checking out books from the classroom library and even read at home. However, they were no longer permitted to do this and as a result they reported that they were reading less outside of class and less for their own personal enjoyment, which several students felt may hinder their growth as a reader.

While students referred to the independent reading of self-selected books as a practice that assisted them in developing their reading comprehension skills and motivated them to read, another theme emerged pertaining to the need for class discussions regarding reading assignments to assist students in developing their reading comprehension. Several students reported that they find it helpful when the teacher prepares them to read a passage by providing background information on the topic if it is unfamiliar or allows students to engage in a class discussion over the topic and relate it to “real life” events. Students stated that discussing reading assignments in a small group setting allowed them to examine the topic from various points of view and reported that they were more engaged in the reading selection, which increased their motivation to read and thus assisted in improving their reading comprehension. Several students reported that they did not like all the independent work on the reading assignments on the computer because they also needed the instruction of the teacher whereas the teacher maintained that such activities were necessary in order to further students’ reading comprehension. Not only was this stated in the interviews, but during the class observations students attempted to have questions answered, and when the students’ questions were not addressed they often remained off-task, which, in some cases, resulted in disruptive behavior, thus adversely affecting the

instruction of fellow classmates. In fact, several students cited the fact that disruptions from other students hindered their progress in reading comprehension.

Another theme that emerged during this study was the way in which the students regard their co-teachers as a major source of support for reading in their content classes. Students referred to their co-teachers as being a source of assistance in their larger content area courses. However, when I asked students what the co-teachers did specifically to assist them in reading comprehension, the students did not describe any reading strategies implemented by the co-teachers. Instead, they stated that the co-teachers read passages to them when they had difficulty comprehending or simply summarized the passage for them, thus eliminating the need for the students to read text for themselves or feel the need to develop strategies to do so. In some cases, students reported that they were often given the answers to questions. While describing these interventions, one student commented that while these interventions helped supply answers, it did little to assist with reading comprehension. Another student commented that he found it more helpful when he was shown a strategy rather than simply told how to complete an assignment. During the interviews, students identified various ways in which schools are currently assisting them in reading comprehension and motivating them to read as well as suggested additional methods and strategies schools could use in order to further the students' reading comprehension skills and motivation to read. A recurring theme throughout the interviews was the assistance of the co-teachers in the larger class settings. While students realized that many of the methods that the co-teachers used did not necessarily assist them with reading comprehension skills, the small setting to which students were sometimes placed as well as the individual attention students received in these small group settings motivated them to continue the class assignment when they felt overwhelmed. Additionally, students reported that the small group settings as well as

the presence of the co-teachers helped them feel more comfortable in asking questions about the content as well as requesting assistance with assignments. Because the role of the small group settings and co-teachers seem quite significant to the students, this situation could be enhanced by providing the co-teachers with reading strategies they could utilize with the students in order to assist the students in building capacity as effective readers. Each student seemed to be very receptive to individualized or small group assistance and reported that they felt more motivated and comfortable in these settings because all students in the small group were experiencing the same difficulties, thus reducing the feeling of self-consciousness the students had reported feeling in the large classes. These responses evidence the fact that the students are cognizant of the development of their reading comprehension skills, and this highlights another theme that emerged during the study: the need for co-teachers to receive training in implementing various reading strategies to help students become independent readers and learners. Based upon the students' interviews, students seemed to feel that they were receiving support in their classes primarily from their co-teachers in their larger content area classes. However, as several students pointed out, they were not receiving assistance in developing reading strategies. Rather, students reported that co-teachers often read difficult passages to them, identified answers in the text, or simply gave them answers when they had difficulty. Several students explained that they interact much more with their co-teachers than their teachers of record when in the larger content area classes due to the fact that the co-teachers offer small group and individualized attention. Several students reported that they felt the teachers of record were often too busy to assist them and did not feel comfortable approaching them with questions. In reference to support in reading comprehension, the students mentioned that they had been placed in the specialized reading classes in order to assist them with reading difficulties. Although the reading classes are small,

several students felt that they did not receive as much individual attention as needed while others felt that they did. This is consistent with what I observed during the classroom observations while the teacher worked with some students and left other students who appeared to work well independently to work on their own. This is also consistent with what I observed during the teacher interviews. The teacher was able to comment on specific needs of certain students while appeared to know very little about the abilities of some of the other students, thus suggesting that the teacher interacts closely with some students while leaving others to work independently because they appear to be capable of doing so. Therefore, it appears that not all students are receiving the same levels of support.

Yet another theme that emerged during the study was the challenge faced by the students in regards to reading comprehension and their motivation to read due to time restrictions. Students commented that they read at a slower pace than their classmates and often require more time to process what they have read or be given time to re-read portions of text. The students reported that when they feel rushed, they often feel overwhelmed and interest in the reading selection is diminished, thus adversely impacting their motivation to read, or they simply rush to complete the reading assignment and do not comprehend it because they are not given adequate time to process the information or re-read the portions that were difficult. Students reported feeling different than their classmates when they have difficulty comprehending text that the rest of the class seems to understand. Therefore, they are less likely to engage in any discussion over the reading because they did not comprehend it. One student described this feeling as being “passed over” and yet another student stated that he wished teachers would realize that everyone is different and allow for such differences. Although many of these students have accommodations in place to assist with these challenges they face, it is important to note the emotional impact

these feelings play when students who have difficulties with reading compare themselves with peers who appear to not have such challenges.

Students also reported that they would feel more motivated to read if they were permitted to read self-selected books in school and would most likely read these books outside of school as well, which would assist them in developing their reading comprehension skills as well as increase their motivation to read due to the positive reading experiences. Several students reported that they did enjoy some of the assigned reading, but would also like the opportunity to read books that were of personal interest to them. Currently, the students stated that they do not have such opportunities in their classes and it would increase their motivation to read if the curriculum would allow them opportunities to read self-selected books.

During the course of the study, it was apparent that a reading teacher must be prepared to address a variety of students and learning styles, and this theme was obvious throughout the study. While the teacher did understand that the students had difficulty with reading comprehension, she did not seem to understand what exactly was the cause of the reading comprehension difficulties, nor was she able to identify any factors that motivated the students to read while the students expressed the option to read self-selected books as a major motivational factor. Most students initially stated that they perceived themselves to be performing adequately in regards to reading comprehension. Later in the interviews, however, the students would explain issues with which they struggled in regards to reading comprehension, thus suggesting that the students are aware of certain difficulties they continue to face regarding reading comprehension. A possible explanation for the students' initial response that suggests they feel they are performing adequately in regards to reading comprehension may be due to the fact that they are supplied correct answers when faced with questions over difficult reading assignment

and have difficult passages read to them, thus perhaps giving them the false sense that they are performing adequately when they are actually struggling with certain reading comprehension skills. Individual needs of the students must be met. Teachers must be prepared to address each student's specific needs in order to effectively assist him or her in developing reading comprehension skills. For example, some students may have difficulty with decoding. Others may have difficulty in maintaining fluency as they read while others may experience difficulties due to a limited vocabulary. Reading teachers must be prepared to utilize strategies that will address the needs of each student in order to develop a meaningful and effective reading program. Students must also receive specific feedback regarding their strengths as well as areas for improvement in order to develop goals for each student to assist him or her in developing reading comprehension skills. Each student must understand these goals and what they are expected to accomplish by attaining them so that they can monitor their own learning and become aware of their progress.

The need for maintaining an orderly classroom was another theme that arose during the study. Discipline and order must also be maintained in the classroom in order to create an effective and suitable learning environment for all students. While this principle is not unique to a reading classroom, it is especially important to maintain when students are facing challenging tasks and developing skills to assist them with concepts they find difficult. A well-managed classroom and program will allow students to feel more comfortable and create a pleasant classroom climate. During the interviews, several students stated that they did not feel comfortable in the larger classes due to the fact that they felt less capable than the other students regarding reading comprehension skills. In order for the class to be effective, students must feel comfortable with one another and with the teacher so that they will venture out of their comfort

zones and take risks. Such a setting will not be possible without maintaining an orderly and well-disciplined classroom.

Chapter V - Discussion

Overview of Significant Findings

The purpose of this study was to discover answers to the following:

1. What specific challenges do at-risk high school students report they face that keeps them from comprehending text at a proficient level?
2. What do at-risk high school students view as ways in which the school can help them achieve reading comprehension proficiency and motivate them to read?
3. Do the at-risk high school students feel they are receiving adequate support to achieve reading comprehension proficiency and motivation to read?
4. How do the perceptions of the particular students included in the study differ from those of their teacher regarding their progress in reading comprehension and motivation to read?

Answers to these questions were sought through student interviews, classroom observations, and teacher interviews. Each of these methods assisted in creating a depiction of the unique challenges faced by struggling students as they pertain to reading comprehension and motivation to read. The student interviews, classroom observations, and teacher interviews served to depict challenges that the students currently face regarding reading comprehension and motivation to read. Throughout the study, issues surfaced that depicted students' experiences as struggling readers and common themes began to emerge.

Challenges Encountered by Struggling Students

Students described a number of issues that they felt hindered them from comprehending text and consequently reduced their motivation to read. Many students cited the fact that they lacked interest in the reading material and this lack of interest affected their motivation to read. Students explained that although they could often decode text, they often missed the depth of the reading selection due to the fact that they were disinterested in the selection itself. This suggests a direct connection between a student's motivation to read and the student's depth of comprehension. Most students stated that they could answer basic questions regarding reading material, but when they were not interested and engaged in the reading assignment, the depth of the piece was lost.

In previous years, the students included in this study had been given time in class for independent reading. During this time, students were to select a book that was of specific interest to them. Students who had difficulty in selecting a book for independent reading time were assisted in finding a book that appealed to them. However, the students stated that they were no longer given time in class to read independently-selected books. Several students stated that the reason why they felt they had developed and improved their reading comprehension skills during the previous years was due to the fact that they were given time to read books in class that were of personal interest and thus motivated them to read because they were provided positive reading experiences. This again suggests a connection between reading comprehension and motivation. The more the students read, the more they felt they improved. Several students stated that they had been accustomed to checking out books from the classroom library and even read at home. However, they were no longer permitted to do this and as a result they reported that they were reading less outside of class and less for their own personal enjoyment, which several students felt may hinder their growth as a reader.

While students referred to the independent reading of self-selected books as a practice that assisted them in developing their reading comprehension skills and motivated them to read, the students also stated that they also needed class discussions regarding reading assignments to assist them in developing their reading comprehension. Several students reported that they did not like all the independent work on the reading assignments on the computer because they also needed the instruction of the teacher. Not only was this stated in the interviews, but during the class observations students attempted to have questions answered, and when the students' questions were not addressed they often remained off-task, which, in some cases, resulted in disruptive behavior, thus adversely affecting the instruction of fellow classmates. In fact, several students cited the fact that disruptions from other students hindered their progress in reading comprehension.

During the interviews, students referred to their co-teachers as being a source of assistance in their larger content area courses. However, when I asked students what the co-teachers did specifically to assist them in reading comprehension, the students did not describe any reading strategies implemented by the co-teachers. Instead, they stated that the co-teachers read passages to them when they had difficulty comprehending or simply summarized the passage for them, thus eliminating the need for the students to read text for themselves or feel the need to develop strategies to do so. In some cases, students reported that they were often given the answers to questions. While describing these interventions, one student commented that while these interventions helped supply answers, it did little to assist with reading comprehension. Another student commented that he found it more helpful when he was shown a strategy rather than simply told how to complete an assignment. These responses evidence the fact that the students are cognizant of the development of their reading comprehension skills.

Yet another challenge faced by the students in regards to reading comprehension and their motivation to read was time restrictions. Students commented that they read at a slower pace than their classmates and often require more time to process what they have read or be given time to re-read portions of text. The students reported that when they feel rushed, they often feel overwhelmed and interest in the reading selection is diminished, thus adversely impacting their motivation to read, or they simply rush to complete the reading assignment and do not comprehend it because they are not given adequate time to process the information or re-read the portions that were difficult. Students reported feeling different than their classmates when they have difficulty comprehending text that the rest of the class seems to understand. Therefore, they are less likely to engage in any discussion over the reading because they did not comprehend it. One student described this feeling as being “passed over” and yet another student stated that he wished teachers would realize that everyone is different and allow for such differences. Although many of these students have accommodations in place to assist with these challenges they face, it is important to note the emotional impact these feelings play when students who have difficulties with reading compare themselves with peers who appear to not have such challenges.

What Can Schools Do to Help?

During the interviews, students identified various ways in which schools are currently assisting them in reading comprehension and motivating them to read as well as suggested additional methods and strategies schools could use in order to further the students’ reading comprehension skills and motivation to read. A recurring theme throughout the interviews was the assistance of the co-teachers in the larger class settings. While students realized that many of

the methods that the co-teachers used did not necessarily assist them with reading comprehension skills, the small setting to which students were sometimes placed as well as the individual attention students received in these small group settings motivated them to continue the class assignment when they felt overwhelmed. Additionally, students reported that the small group settings as well as the presence of the co-teachers helped them feel more comfortable in asking questions about the content as well as requesting assistance with assignments. Because the role of the small group settings and co-teachers seem quite significant to the students, this situation could be enhanced by providing the co-teachers with reading strategies they could utilize with the students in order to assist the students in building capacity as effective readers. Each student seemed to be very receptive to individualized or small group assistance and reported that they felt more motivated and comfortable in these settings because all students in the small group were experiencing the same difficulties, thus reducing the feeling of self-consciousness the students had reported feeling in the large classes.

Students also reported that they would feel more motivated to read if they were permitted to read self-selected books in school and would most likely read these books outside of school as well, which would assist them in developing their reading comprehension skills as well as increase their motivation to read due to the positive reading experiences. Several students reported that they did enjoy some of the assigned reading, but would also like the opportunity to read books that were of personal interest to them. Currently, the students stated that they do not have such opportunities in their classes and it would increase their motivation to read if the curriculum would allow them opportunities to read self-selected books. This connection between motivation and increase in reading comprehension is highlighted in Wolk's article in which he argues that students simply are not motivated to read because of the archaic selections presented

them in the classroom. If students are not motivated to read and do not see any relevance in doing so, then they simply will not and therefore reading comprehension will not be practiced or enhanced. Wolk (2010) reinforced this notion as he stated:

If we want to nurture lifelong reader and thinkers, to cultivate social responsibility, to make reading relevant to the 21st century, and to bring joy to reading, then the status quo will not suffice. The status quo will only continue to teach kids to hate reading and to see education as irrelevant. When seen cumulatively, the reading students do in school appears to be designed to make reading painful, tedious, and irrelevant. (Wolk, 2010, p. 1)

While students expressed a desire to read self-selected books, they also referred to several strategies that teachers may consider using because the strategies have been helpful to them in the past and students feel they would benefit from them. Several students reported that they find it helpful when the teacher prepares them to read a passage by providing background information on the topic if it is unfamiliar or allows students to engage in a class discussion over the topic and relate it to “real life” events. Students stated that discussing reading assignments in a small group setting allowed them to examine the topic from various points of view and reported that they were more engaged in the reading selection, which increased their motivation to read and thus assisted in improving their reading comprehension.

Level of Support

Based upon the students’ interviews, students seemed to feel that they were receiving support in their classes primarily from their co-teachers in their larger content area classes.

However, as several students pointed out, they were not receiving assistance in developing reading strategies. Rather, students reported that co-teachers often read difficult passages to them, identified answers in the text, or simply gave them answers when they had difficulty. Several students explained that they interact much more with their co-teachers than their teachers of record when in the larger content area classes due to the fact that the co-teachers offer small group and individualized attention. Several students reported that they felt the teachers of record were often too busy to assist them and did not feel comfortable approaching them with questions. In reference to support in reading comprehension, the students mentioned that they had been placed in the specialized reading classes in order to assist them with reading difficulties. Although the reading classes are small, several students felt that they did not receive as much individual attention as needed while others felt that they did. This is consistent with what I observed during the classroom observations while the teacher worked with some students and left other students who appeared to work well independently to work on their own. This is also consistent with what I observed during the teacher interviews. The teacher was able to comment on specific needs of certain students while appeared to know very little about the abilities of some of the other students, thus suggesting that the teacher interacts closely with some students while leaving others to work independently because they appear to be capable of doing so. Therefore, it appears that not all students are receiving the same levels of support.

Teacher's versus Students' Perceptions of Reading Comprehension Skills and Motivation

Based upon the teacher's interviews regarding the students' reading comprehension skills and motivation to read, it appeared that the students were more perceptive of the nature of their

particular difficulties regarding reading comprehension than the teacher. While the teacher did understand that the students had difficulty with reading comprehension, she did not seem to understand what exactly was the cause of the reading comprehension difficulties, nor was she able to identify any factors that motivated the students to read while the students expressed the option to read self-selected books as a major motivational factor. Most students initially stated that they perceived themselves to be performing adequately in regards to reading comprehension. Later in the interviews, however, the students would explain issues with which they struggled in regards to reading comprehension, thus suggesting that the students are aware of certain difficulties they continue to face regarding reading comprehension. A possible explanation for the students' initial response that suggests they feel they are performing adequately in regards to reading comprehension may be due to the fact that they are supplied correct answers when faced with questions over difficult reading assignment and have difficult passages read to them, thus perhaps giving them the false sense that they are performing adequately when they are actually struggling with certain reading comprehension skills.

Implications for Professional Practice

Based upon the findings of this study, several implications exist regarding the development of quality reading programs for struggling high school readers. Based upon the data gathered during the course of this study, it is apparent that motivation plays a significant role in assisting students in developing reading comprehension skills. Most of the students who participated in the study cited a lack of interest in the reading assignment as playing a major factor in their reading comprehension abilities. Students must be motivated to read, and teachers

must be cognizant of what factors influence their students' motivation to read. Teachers must learn various strategies to engage students in reading assignments in order to facilitate improvement in students' reading comprehension abilities.

Individual needs of the students must be met. Teachers must be prepared to address each student's specific needs in order to effectively assist him or her in developing reading comprehension skills. For example, some students may have difficulty with decoding. Others may have difficulty in maintaining fluency as they read while others may experience difficulties due to a limited vocabulary. Reading teachers must be prepared to utilize strategies that will address the needs of each student in order to develop a meaningful and effective reading program. Reading teachers must be equipped through training as suggested by the International Reading Association and ideally a Reading Specialist would be selected to deliver such instruction. According to the recommendations of the International Reading Association, the reading specialist teaches students from early childhood through adult levels. The reading specialist must be able to fulfill the duties of a reading intervention teacher, a reading or literacy coach, or a reading coordinator. These specialists are to serve resources for school personnel, plan reading programs for diverse learners, provide professional development, and provide leadership in student advocacy. They are to have previous teaching experience, a minimum of a Master's degree with a concentration in reading education, and minimum of 24 graduate hours in reading and language arts instruction, and 6-semester hours of supervised practicum experience (*International Reading Association: Standards for reading professionals*, 2003). Such experience equips the professional with the necessary knowledge and background with which to devise the most effective delivery of reading intervention for specific student needs.

Students must also receive specific feedback regarding their strengths as well as areas for improvement in order to develop goals for each student to assist him or her in developing reading comprehension skills. Each student must understand these goals and what they are expected to accomplish by attaining them so that they can monitor their own learning and become aware of their progress.

Discipline and order must also be maintained in the classroom in order to create an effective and suitable learning environment for all students. While this principle is not unique to a reading classroom, it is especially important to maintain when students are facing challenging tasks and developing skills to assist them with concepts they find difficult. A well-managed classroom and program will allow students to feel more comfortable and create a pleasant classroom climate. During the interviews, several students stated that they did not feel comfortable in the larger classes due to the fact that they felt less capable than the other students regarding reading comprehension skills. In order for the class to be effective, students must feel comfortable with one another and with the teacher so that they will venture out of their comfort zones and take risks. Such a setting will not be possible without maintaining an orderly and well-disciplined classroom.

Limitations of the Study

The purpose of the study was to portray the unique challenges faced by struggling 11th grade at-risk students pertaining to reading comprehension skills and their motivation to read. Due to the fact that I had two years to build rapport with each student included in the study due to my interactions with them as their previous reading teacher, the students seemed to feel

comfortable with me and therefore shared their thoughts and feelings regarding the topics rather easily. Therefore, this study may be difficult to replicate due to the fact that it relied heavily upon students' responses and reactions which were easily elicited due to the two years I had to develop rapport with the students. Without such rapport with the students, a researcher may find generating in-depth responses from students to be a difficult task, thus providing a limitation to this study.

Additionally, the study examines the students' interactions during one particular class. The reading class was selected due to the fact that it is the intervention primarily utilized by the school to assist the students with reading comprehension difficulties. However, it is important to note that not all reading classes are conducted in the same way the teacher in the study chose to conduct hers. While this particular class may be representative of the way in which some classes are conducted, it would be incorrect to assume that all reading classes are conducted in this manner and make such a generalization. Furthermore, the study was not intended to investigate whether the teacher was implementing the Read 180 program as it was intended to be delivered and therefore the study is not intended to reflect or infer anything regarding the quality of the Read 180 program.

Areas to Consider for Further Study

One of the purposes of this study was to generate students' input regarding the level of support they currently receive in reading comprehension. Students revealed that they receive the most assistance from their co-teachers. However, students also stated that the assistance they received from the co-teachers consisted mainly of summaries, reading passages read to them, and

answers provided to them when they experienced difficulty with the assignments. Further study regarding the professional development of co-teachers would be especially helpful in that it may provide insight as to what strategies the co-teachers have been taught to use when working with the students and suggest recommendations for professional development in utilizing effective reading strategies when working with the students.

Another possible area to consider for further study is the expectations of schools in regards to the qualifications of reading teachers and the impact this has upon the quality of instruction students receive. Some schools may have very high expectations for reading teachers in that they require the teachers to have a Reading Specialist certification which requires the teacher to also hold at least a Masters degree. Other schools may require reading teachers to have an English/Language Arts certification which can allow them to teach reading, but does not provide the depth of knowledge in reading instruction that a Reading Specialist would possess. Further study in this area may prove helpful in investigating the quality of instruction and the teacher and how those factors affect student performance.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocols

Interview Protocol for Students

Topic Domain 1: Difficulty comprehending written text

Lead-off Question: “During a typical school day, explain to me how easy or difficult is it for you to keep up with your reading assignments?”

[Covert Categories: Are students applying strategies taught to them during the previous two years transferring over to this year? Are students using self-monitoring strategies when reading comprehension breaks down? Are students interested in the material enough to read about it?]

Possible follow-up questions:

1. (If reading assignments are difficult) “Can you explain to me why you find these reading assignments difficult for you?”
2. (If reading assignments are easy) “Can you explain to me what makes these reading assignments easy for you?”
3. “Explain how the amount of time you are given to read a passage affects your understanding of the passage.”
4. “Tell me what you enjoy about reading.”
5. “Tell me what you dislike about reading.”

Topic Domain 2: Solutions to achieve reading comprehension proficiency

Lead-off Question: “Last year you made some significant gains in your reading comprehension scores. What do you think helped you make these significant gains?”

[Covert categories: Have the strategies taught during the last two years in the reading classes helped students make these gains in reading comprehension? Have students' reading comprehension abilities increased because they are reading more independently? Do students feel more motivated to read due to increased confidence instilled by using the strategies taught during the last two years in the reading class?]

Possible follow-up questions:

1. "Describe the last book/magazine/printed material you most recently read just because you wanted to."
2. "Describe to me the way you feel when you read in class."
3. "Describe to me the way you feel when you read outside of class on your own."
4. "Explain what your teachers do for you in class to help you with reading?"

Topic Domain 3: Support for reading comprehension proficiency

Lead –off Question: "When the reading assignment in class is difficult, explain what your teachers do to help you comprehend the reading assignment on your own?"

[Covert categories: Are teachers implementing reading strategies in their classrooms? Are the students applying previously-taught strategies from reading class to their other academic classes? Are teachers requiring students to read in all academic areas?]

Possible follow-up questions:

1. “Explain why you think some reading assignments may be easier in some classes, but more difficult in other.”
2. “Describe your most favorite subject.”
3. “Tell me what you enjoy most about that subject.”
4. “Describe your least favorite subject.”
5. “Tell me what you dislike about that subject.”

Interview Protocol for Teachers

Topic Domain 1: Teacher's awareness of student's difficulty comprehending written text

Lead-off Question: "During a typical school day, what is your opinion of how the student is comprehending his or her reading assignments?"

[Covert Categories: Do the students appear to be applying strategies taught to them during the previous two years transferring over to this year? Do the students appear to be using self-monitoring strategies when reading comprehension breaks down? Do the students appear interested in the material enough to read about it?]

Possible follow-up questions:

1. (If reading assignments are difficult) "Can you explain to me why you think these reading assignments are difficult for the student?"
2. (If reading assignments are easy) "Can you explain to me what you think makes these reading assignments easy for the student?"
3. "Explain how the student's reading comprehension is affected by the amount of time he or she given to read a passage."
4. "Describe the student's attitude towards reading in your class."
5. "Explain why the student may display that particular attitude towards reading in your class."

Topic Domain 2: Teacher's perceived solutions to achieve reading comprehension proficiency

Lead-off Question: “Last year this student made some significant gains in his or her reading comprehension scores. Can you tell me more about how he/she is performing in your class regarding reading comprehension based upon the student’s actions, activities, and assessments?”

[Covert categories: Have the strategies taught during the last two years in the reading classes helped students make these gains in reading comprehension? Have students’ reading comprehension abilities increased because they are reading more independently? Do students seem to feel more motivated to read due to increased confidence instilled by using the strategies taught during the last two years in the reading class?]

Possible follow-up questions:

1. “Describe the level of confidence the student displays when reading content in your class.”
2. “When reading an assignment outside of class, describe how prepared the student is to discuss the assigned reading in class.”
3. “Describe a strategy you use in your class to assist this student comprehend reading assignments for your class.”

Topic Domain 3: Support for reading comprehension proficiency

Lead –off Question: “When a student is struggling with reading comprehension, describe the type of support you receive from the school.”

[Covert categories: Are teachers implementing reading strategies in their classrooms? Are the students applying previously-taught strategies from reading class to their other academic classes? Are teachers requiring students to read in all academic areas?]

Possible follow-up questions:

1. “Describe a situation in which the student experienced success comprehending a reading assignment for your class.”
2. “Explain what you attribute to the student’s success.”
3. “Describe how receptive the student is to your assistance when it comes to reading comprehension.”
4. “Explain what the student finds most enjoyable about your class.”