

READING IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES AND NATURAL SCIENCE CONTENT
AREA:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, AND
STRATEGIES SIXTH AND SEVENTH GRADE CONTENT AREA TEACHERS USE
TO TEACH BELOW GRADE LEVEL READERS

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READING IN THE CONTENT AREA: A PHENOLMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE
BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, AND STRATEGIES TEACHERS USE TO TEACH BELOW
GRADE LEVEL READERS CONTENT MATERIAL
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ABSTRACT

Lisa A. Clark. READING IN THE CONTENT AREA: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, AND STRATEGIES TEACHERS USE TO TEACH BELOW GRADE LEVEL READERS CONTENT MATERIAL. (Under the direction of Dr. Mark A. Lamport). School of Education, July 18, 2011.

The purposes of this study were to identify the attitudes and beliefs content teachers have concerning teaching reading in the content area to below level readers and to identify specific instructional strategies that are used to teach students who are below grade level the content area material. Twelve participants were selected, using maximum variation sampling, based on the grade level and content area they taught. Data was collected from middle school content area teachers using interviews, surveys, observations, and document examination in an attempt to identify attitudes, beliefs, and specific challenges content teachers face instructing below grade level readers. The data was collected, coded and analyzed for specific commonalities. The constructivist's theory served as the framework for the study with emphasis on experiential learning. The experiences that the participants had as early learners, older students, and adult teachers mold their level of efficacy, the way they teach, and the way they view teaching and learning. Based on the data collected and analyzed, common attitudes and beliefs were present among the participants. Common instructional strategies used with below level learners were also identified. The challenges content area teachers face were also recognized. Recommendations were made to school districts, teacher prep programs administrators and to others for further research.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my very supportive husband, Troy. Thank you for all of the personal and financial sacrifices you made to help me accomplish this dream. I would also like to give recognition and thanks to my children, Cole and Allison. They have been supportive, patient, and encouraging throughout the process and always gave me my “homework” time and work space. Finally, this project is dedicated to all teachers of content area material. I have learned a great deal about the struggles, concerns, and accomplishments of content area teachers and hope that my findings will in some way assist them in their academic endeavors.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Many instructional arrangements seem ‘contrived,’ but there is nothing wrong with that. It is the teacher's function to contrive conditions under which students learn. It has always been the task of formal education to set up behavior which would prove useful or enjoyable later in a student's life.”

~B.F. Skinner

Middle school content area teachers have struggled with teaching below-level readers for many years. Much of the content is taught through reading texts and synthesizing the information. The expectation is when students enter middle school; they should be on grade level reading, and therefore able to learn content area material at the same rate and in the same way as everyone else. However, according to content area teachers, that is not the case. Students enter middle school content classes at a variety of learning readiness levels thus creating problems for content area teachers as they realize one plan will not teach all. Current research has shown that students' reading abilities impact their progress in content classes when they enter middle school (Bryant, D., Thompson, S., Ugel, N., Hamff, A., & Hougen, M., 2001).

Researchers have agreed that students benefit from reading instruction in their content area classes (Hall, 2005). While content area teachers at all grade levels have stated for many years that teaching below level students content area material is difficult, studies have shown that students with differing abilities in reading can improve their comprehension and learn different contexts when they receive reading instruction in the content area (Bos, Anders, Filip, & Jaffe, 1989; Lederer, 2000). Teachers need to make

literacy and reading skill instruction a priority in content courses across the curriculum if students are to be prepared to cope with the ever-increasing demands of the marketplace (Barton, 1997). Preparing students can be accomplished by teaching them the reading skills they need to be able to learn and to apply new content knowledge. The challenge is teaching the skills across the curriculum so that there is generalization from one area of learning to another. However, content teachers are not confident about their abilities to teach reading in their classes (Liang & Dole, 2006).

The enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) raises the awareness of achievement rates of all students. In 2001 NCLB placed more emphasis on high stakes testing for content level courses historically reserved for reading and math courses. NCLB also requires students to pass history and science tests in order to receive the necessary verified credits for graduation. The graduation requirements of NCLB put additional pressure and stress on the middle school teachers who are responsible for laying the foundation for the high school courses and preparing students for the rigorous high school content. These students often are not at a readiness level conducive to traditional middle school instruction.

A great deal of research in the area of content area teaching is focused at the middle and high school level. At these levels, teachers tend to be content specialists and often struggle with how to teach reading in the content area to those students who may not be reading or comprehending on grade level. One of the difficulties for students who struggle with being successful in content area classes, such as social studies and science, is the difficult level of the textbooks and the increased demands of vocabulary knowledge.

While all teachers are not reading teachers by practice and title, all teachers should be able to teach reading in the form of comprehension in order for students to learn the content material. Content area teachers often struggle with seeing the importance of teaching reading in their classrooms (O'Brien & Stewart, 1990). The beliefs and attitudes of teachers are often such that they do not take ownership of the responsibility for teaching students to read the content material.

Students are at various stages of reading development throughout their academic careers. For example, a third grade classroom could be composed of students who are reading in a range of levels from pre-reading readiness to high school level. Reading as a separate subject is most often taught developmentally in elementary classrooms. The variances in levels of reading ability carry over to middle school and high school. There must be a certain set of beliefs, attitudes, and strategies that teachers implement which enable them to deliver instruction to below grade level readers that help them attain academic success. Educators need more research to determine what teachers are doing in the content areas to reach the below grade level students.

Rationale for Study

This study provides a thorough scholarly investigation of teachers who teach content area material as well as an in-depth look into content area teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices for teaching below-level readers in the content areas. The data gained from a sample of the population who teach science and social studies at the middle school level provides useful information for teacher education programs, mentor programs, and teachers who are currently in the field. The results of this study will highlight gaps in previous literature based on empirical data and will also provide school

administrators with an insight to the practices and beliefs of their teachers, enabling the administration to focus at the school level, on professional development and improving practices.

There are a number of factors that impact the teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and choice of instructional strategies when teaching content courses to students who have below grade level reading skills. Teacher preparation programs, student teaching experiences, course work in teaching reading, level of teacher efficacy when teaching reading strategies, and the value given to teaching reading in content areas are all factors to be considered in this research project. Teachers select strategies with which they have the highest level of efficacy with and often ignore what research says is most effective. Teacher preparation programs, support available from administration and division administration in the form of professional development, accountability, and personal beliefs and attitudes are key factors influencing the teachers' practices (Flint, A., Maloch, B., & Leland, C., 2010).

Identifying the most effective teaching strategies has been a goal of educational researchers for a very long time. Madeline Hunter worked closely with John Goodlad in the late 1960s and early 1970s to develop a model of instruction, Instructional Theory into Practice (ITIP), which is still used today (Hunter, 1983). The ITIP model emphasized teacher decision making focused on seven components of instruction. The seven components of instruction include knowledge of human growth and development, content, classroom management, materials, planning, human relations, and instructional skills. According to Hunter's research, these components were found to be the most important areas for focus in order to maximize learning. In the area of instructional

skills, seven other components were identified as target areas for best practice. They include objectives, standards, anticipatory set, teaching (i.e., input, modeling, checking for understanding), guided practice/monitoring, closure, and independent practice (Hunter, 1983).

For a long time, researchers have believed that incorporating reading instruction into content areas would be very beneficial to students. The reading instruction in content areas would increase the students' abilities to learn content material and improve their reading skills (Hall, 2004). Current research states that middle school students possess a wide range of reading levels which impacts their abilities to learn in the content areas, but it does not specifically address the critical elementary grades 3-6 when students are making the transition from learning to read to reading to learn (Anderson & Roit, 1993). Students at these early and middle grades must also be taught skills for manipulating text and making connections to their prior knowledge and learning so that they learn from more complicated texts at higher grade levels. Students must be able to interpret content textbooks, vocabulary, and ideas. In 1990, O'Brien and Stewart completed a study that showed, despite the proven benefits of implementing reading into the content area, content area teachers continue to struggle to do so.

Research Focus

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe the attitudes, beliefs, and instructional strategies of content area teachers at the middle school level and what they do to teach below grade level students. Specifically, the study seeks answers to four questions:

1. What are teachers' beliefs about teaching reading in the content area to students who are below grade level readers?
2. What are teachers' attitudes towards teaching reading in the content area to students who are below grade level readers?
3. What are the strategies teachers are using to teach below grade level students content material?
4. What challenges do content area teachers face when teaching content material to students who are below grade level?

Definitions

Details of the study will be discussed using key terms frequently. Those key terms are defined below:

Content area teacher – These teachers choose their profession based on their love for, and interest in, a particular subject. Most of their education is based on one particular subject, and they are only required to take one or two reading courses at the most (Jones, 2006). Content areas teachers teach specific disciplines such as math, social studies, or science. They are required to have a bachelor's degree with 21 credit hours of concentration in the area they will be teaching. Additionally, they must complete only three semester hours of reading in the content area (Virginia Department of Education, 2007).

Comprehension – The process of constructing a supportable understanding of a text (Neufeld, 2005). Comprehension requires the reader to actively construct knowledge and meaning from the text. Meaning is not perceived just because it is read. Readers must actively be engaged in the text and with the text in order to understand it. The degree of

comprehension also depends on the reader's previous experiences, feelings, and reasons for reading (Mairotti, 2010).

Content literacy – Content literacy is achieved by those who possess the skills necessary to learn content area material.

Highly qualified – The federal government defines a highly qualified teacher as a teacher who is fully licensed by the state, has at least a bachelor's degree and has demonstrated competency in each subject taught (Department of Education, 2001).

Instructional strategies – Instructional strategies are the skills and methods teachers use to deliver instruction.

Phenomenology – Phenomenology is a qualitative method of inquiry that investigates the subject's perception of experiences in order to gain meaning.

Reading in the content area – Reading in the content area is defined as students being able to read science and social studies materials (texts, worksheets, news articles, etc.) and process the information using a metacognitive approach. Key components include comprehension, application, and connection to the text (Hall, 2005).

Struggling Readers – Struggling readers are defined as students who cannot decode, comprehend, and/or make connections with content area texts. These students often do not see themselves as good readers. They may behave in helpless manners when encountering difficult reading tasks and be unable to apply strategies effectively (Hall, 2005).

Teacher efficacy – Teacher efficacy is the teacher's belief in his or her ability to make a difference in student learning. It has been identified as an important attribute of effective

teachers and has a direct impact on student outcomes and teachers' professional development.

Personal Interests

My philosophy of education is strongly rooted in beliefs as a mother, former elementary teacher, reading specialist and principal. Previous experiences teaching reading to elementary children and observing reading being taught in varied settings have helped build the foundation for the beliefs of the researcher. Reading is the key to learning and must be taught by all teachers every day in all subjects. Content area teachers cannot expect students to be able to learn new material simply by reading or hearing it. Content teachers need to know how to use instructional strategies that teach the material beyond reading it – they must be able to teach for comprehension and understanding. Students who are below grade level readers often do not have the vocabulary skills needed to connect with the new learning requirements. Therefore, teachers in the content areas must be able to teach vocabulary in meaningful ways so that it connects to the learning objectives and does not become a rote memorization exercise. Teachers who are successfully teaching reading in the content area possess sound knowledge of their content subject and provide students varied opportunities to access that knowledge. Successful teachers have a high level of efficacy and believe they are responsible for the students' learning regardless of the reading level of the students. Successful teachers have confidence in their abilities to produce student learning; therefore, they will perform the necessary actions. Through an examination of attitudes and beliefs, the challenges that content area teachers face with teaching reading in their content subjects have also been discovered (Paulou, 2007).

Significance in the Field

Unfortunately, many teachers enter the field unprepared to teach reading in the content areas. Many current content teachers do not view themselves as reading teachers and do not think part of their job is to teach reading. Others feel that they are not qualified to teach reading to their students (Hall, 2005). Rather, they are content experts as their teacher preparation programs required them to select a focus area of certification in which they took concentrated courses and completed student teaching. Teacher preparation programs that place the majority of their emphasis on the content area often fail to give enough attention to teaching reading. Teachers who are new to the field of education may not have had time to develop a set of skills or may not have the confidence they need to be successful teachers for students who struggle in the area of reading (Donahue, 2000). The findings of this study contribute valuable information in the areas of teaching content material to struggling readers. The findings also serve as an aide in the improvement of professional development and mentoring programs. Current practices can be better analyzed and improved upon with the identification of beliefs, attitudes and present practices of content teachers. Preparation for professional development activities can be refined to meet the areas that this study identified as challenges for teachers. Mentoring programs for new content teachers can now have a focus based on the findings of this study that will prepare them for teaching reading in their content area.

Summary

Students working below grade level know that they struggle in learning content material. They often refuse to ask for help, pretend they are doing fine, or will initiate

behavior problems to get out of a class they may be struggling in. The classroom teacher has the responsibility of understanding each student's academic needs. When students feel comfortable in their classes, they are more likely to behave and learn. Content area teachers need to be able to provide that comfort level so that students are motivated and engaged. This is difficult if the content teacher is not committed to including literacy instruction as a goal or objective. Content teachers also need strategies to help them reach students at all levels. While there are many studies available that highlight the advances in teaching and learning, few strategies are actually transferred to the classroom (Alger, 2007). This study shares the voices of content area teachers and reveals their attitudes and beliefs about teaching reading in the content area. Further, the study investigates the strategies teachers use with students who are below grade level, in hopes of improving teaching reading in the content area so that students will be successful.

Preview of Subsequent Chapters

Chapter two presents a vast literature review which serves as a foundation to the research. Topics included in the literature review are teaching reading, most effective teaching strategies, reading in the content area, and science and social studies instruction. Chapter three contains a description of the methodology to be used and the questions to be examined as well as selection of participants, data gathering, and limitations of the study. Chapter four presents the analysis of the data collected through observations, surveys, document analysis, and interviews. Chapter five focuses on the summary of findings, and presents recommendations for best practice and professional development. Chapter five concludes with recommendations for further research possibilities.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Framework of Literature

To begin to structure the literature review, a search was performed for key terms such as *teaching reading, content area teaching and reading, teacher efficacy, best practices, instructional strategies, science instruction and social studies instruction.*

There is an enormous amount of research in each of the fields listed above. The literature review was structured to focus on describing a background for the study and providing literature to support the goals of the study. Further, it describes works of others in the field of teaching reading in the content area.

Teaching Reading

Teaching reading is considered to be the most important part of school (Barton, 1997). Once a child can read, many learning opportunities open up to him. Students come to school prepared to learn to read at many different levels based on prior experience with books, print, preschool experiences, and parent involvement at early ages. The differences in readiness levels and performance levels usually stay consistent, and most children who get off to a slow start in reading remain behind (Hiebert & Taylor, 1994).

The Partnership for Reading is a coalition of the National Institute for Literacy, the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, and the U.S. Department of Education. The National Institute for Literacy is an independent federal organization that supports state, regional, and national services for literacy in order for Americans to develop the reading skills needed to be successful in the workplace, at home, and in the

community (Armbruster & Osborn, 2001). Together these agencies published *Put Reading First, the Research Building Blocks for Teaching Children to Read*, in September, 2001. The booklet was created by teachers, for teachers, as a summary of what research has shown to be the most effective ways to teach children to read. Also included are the findings of the National Reading Panel Report identifying the five areas of reading instruction -- phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and text comprehension. The report was designed to be a resource to help guide educators through the understanding of what works in reading instruction. With the enactment of NCLB, the booklets were distributed to schools nationwide in an attempt to develop a common understanding about reading instruction. The five areas of reading instruction listed are primarily taught at the elementary school level. However, the importance of teaching vocabulary and comprehension is crucial to middle school teachers who have struggling readers in their classrooms. The remaining components of reading instruction are important for all teachers to understand in order to frame their own beliefs and practices. The booklet offers guidance in the area of comprehension and vocabulary instruction; however, it is not specific to middle school instruction.

Phonemic Awareness. Phonemic awareness is the ability to distinguish and manipulate individual sounds in spoken word. To do this, students must understand that words are made up of phonemes or individual sounds. A phoneme is the smallest part of a word. Children who have phoneme awareness usually have a less difficult time learning to read and spell. Phonemic awareness differs from phonics in that phonics is the understanding between the predictable relationships among phonemes in the written language. In order for phonics instruction to be successful, students must have phoneme

awareness. Other types of phonological awareness include identifying and creating rhymes, identifying syllables, identifying rhymes in spoken syllables, and identifying individual phonemes in spoken words (Armbruster, & Osborn, 2001).

Phonics Instruction. Phonics instruction teaches children the relationships between letters in written language and individual sounds in spoken words. By understanding the relationship between written and spoken sounds, students learn to better decode words when reading. Systematic phonics instruction is more beneficial to reading instruction than non-systematic. However, phonics instruction is not an entire reading program for beginning readers. In order to teach students to read and understand text, teachers should read aloud, allow students to read aloud and silently, and provide instruction that incorporates writing in the form of letters and stories. Teachers monitor progress and determine the need for additional assistance by asking questions, listening to students read aloud, and sharing messages (Armbruster & Osborn, 2001).

Fluency Instruction. Fluency in reading is the ability to read with accuracy and recognize words automatically. Fluent readers group words in ways so that meaning is attained. Symbols such as commas are recognized and processed during fluent reading, and the reading mimics natural speech. Fluency is often considered the bridge between recognizing words and understanding what the words mean. Fluent readers focus their attention on understanding what they are reading by making connections between the current text and background knowledge. Less fluent readers are mostly concerned with the decoding of words and have little understanding of what they have read (Armbruster, & Osborn, 2001).

Vocabulary Instruction. Vocabulary instruction is teaching students the words they need to know in order to understand and communicate successfully. Students' oral vocabularies refer to the words they know and use when they are speaking, while their reading vocabulary refers to the words they know and understand as they are reading. Vocabulary is very important to reading comprehension and is often a stumbling block for students making the transition from learning to read to reading to learn. When discussing vocabulary, Armbruster and Osborn (2001) describe four types:

Listening vocabulary – the words we need to know to understand what we hear.

Speaking vocabulary – the words we use when we speak.

Reading vocabulary – the words we need to know to understand what we read.

Writing vocabulary – the words we use when we write.

As students progress through grades and content material, they learn new words that are not part of their oral vocabulary. This new vocabulary is learned in many different ways. It can be learned indirectly when words are heard and seen in different contexts. Students learn when they hear adults reading to them and then engage in conversations about what has been read. Students also learn indirectly when reading on their own. Direct vocabulary instruction takes place with focus on individual words and word-learning strategies (Armbruster & Osborn, 2001). Directly teaching specific vocabulary words at the beginning of a new unit will increase a student's comprehension of the new material. Flanigan and Greenwood (2007), describe these words as “foot in the door” or “must know before reading” words.

Reading Comprehension. Comprehension has been referred to as the reason for reading. Comprehension of text is important if learning is to occur. When students learn

to read and comprehend, they should be taught skills that show them how to read for purpose and to be active readers. Being an active reader engages the metacognitive skills necessary for students to be able to think about what they are reading, generate questions, and draw conclusions. Comprehension skills can be taught through explicit instruction, cooperative learning, modeling, guided practice, and with teacher monitoring. Other successful teaching strategies include using graphic and semantic organizers, answering and generating questions, summarizing, and providing direct explanation. In addition, teachers need to know how to help students access prior knowledge (Armbruster & Osborn, 2001). According to Piaget, new learning is built on experiences involving action and is stimulated by those experiences; therefore, providing experiences and helping students access them is crucial for continued development and comprehension of new information (Hinde & Perry, 2007).

A framework for teaching comprehension called Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) was designed to help students comprehend a particular content subject while learning to use comprehension strategies (Liang & Dole, 2006). The goal of the CORI program is to achieve student motivation and engagement with the text. CORI consists of four stages designed to help reach the goal. The first phase is observation and personalization where students observe and interact directly with the content they are studying. They ask questions, note details, and are intrinsically motivated to learn more about the objects they are interacting with. The second phase is called search and retrieve where students gather information about the objects using a variety of texts and materials. Direct instruction is provided by the teacher on methods of searching for the information. In the third phase, students begin to comprehend and

integrate the information. It is in this stage that the direct instruction from the teacher focuses on comprehension strategies. In the final stage, communication, students present the material they have learned to their peers (Liang & Dole, 2006).

Comprehension instruction needs to become an integral part of content area instruction. The teaching of reading comprehension should not be viewed as the role of language arts teachers alone (Neufeld, 2005). Achieving success in science and social studies heavily relies on the students' ability to comprehend and process the material they gain from texts (Dimino, 2007).

Teaching reading requires teachers to be aware of the many different components required to be a good reader. If children are weak in one reading skill, the other skills will be impacted and the comprehensive act of reading for meaning will be compromised. It is difficult for the lower level readers to develop the skills they need without additional intense instruction (Chall, Jacobs, & Baldwin, 1990).

Reading in the Content Area

One of the goals of reading text is to be able to gain knowledge and learn new information about what is read. Students should possess the comprehension skills necessary to learn from what they read. If they lack the necessary skills, the teachers have the responsibility of teaching those skills to acquire meaning from the text. Middle school teachers often complain that the students who come to them from the elementary schools do not have the skills in place to master the content specific areas that they are responsible for teaching (Billmeyer, 1996). In order to be a successful reader of content material, students need to be able to recognize their own role in comprehension and connect to the information. Teachers need to recognize their role in helping students

make connections and actively teach strategies that enable students to access background knowledge, understand text features, and practice metacognitive elements of learning (Billmeyer, 1996). National assessments have reported that there is a need for infusion of literacy instruction across the curriculum in middle and high school classrooms (Cantrell & Callaway, 2008). In general, teachers at the high school and middle school levels are not well prepared to implement literacy approaches and practices associated with reading instruction into their content specific courses (Cantrell & Callaway, 2008).

Another goal of content area reading is that the students become metacognitive thinkers and not just repeaters of facts. Students need to be able to move beyond simply stating the facts of what they have read, which places more reading and comprehension demands on them. The need for background knowledge is important for this goal to be met because information cannot be processed at an evaluative or analytical level if the student does not have the necessary skills to process (Hall, 2005).

Learning from texts is the typical mode of instruction in content area classes. It is an important part of learning in most subjects. Textbooks can often be unorganized, difficult to comprehend, and may not provide enough essential information about the subject matter to be learned (Armbruster & Anderson, 1988). Additionally, the textbooks can contain vocabulary that is new to students. Without sufficient background knowledge, the new vocabulary becomes difficult for students to process and understand thus making it even more difficult to remember unless connections can be made. Instruction on new vocabulary words prior to reading is one strategy that helps increase the connections made in content area reading, thus increasing the learning and building of knowledge (Dimino, 2007). Students who struggle with reading strategies are more

likely to experience difficulty comprehending texts and understanding material presented in content-based classroom. Often these students have been taught the skills at earlier grade levels to help them decode and comprehend the text, but they do not extend those skills to different academic settings; however, students who receive systematic instruction on comprehension of content text and reading show improved performance (Adams, Carnine, & Gersten, 1982).

Michael McKenna and Richard Robinson (1991) described the difference between content knowledge and content literacy. Content knowledge is what students know about the content while content literacy is the set of skills that enable them to acquire the knowledge about the content. The content learning process was described by McKenna and Robinson (1991) as a cyclical pattern with emphasis being placed on prior knowledge; therefore, allowing more learning. McKenna and Robinson (1991) also state that content area teachers can teach the content literacy skills simply by teaching the content as long as they are using high quality direct instruction.

Teacher Beliefs.

Teacher beliefs about reading instruction play a crucial role in their classroom practices and instruction (Konopak, Readence, & Wilson, 1994). Teachers who come to believe that one of their roles is to help students become critical thinkers in relation to content material as a way to improve academic performance will change their beliefs about teaching reading in the content area. Traditionally, content area teachers have had difficulty implementing the instruction of reading strategies into their daily lessons (Fisher & Ivey, 2005). In a study by Nance Wilson, Dana Grisham, and Linda Smetana (2009), it was discovered that secondary teachers who had experienced professional

development in teaching reading in the content area did later employ those skills in their lesson plans and classroom activities. This study also revealed that secondary and middle school teachers welcome the use of effective teaching strategies as long as they see the content material as the central focus and are provided professional development for using the reading strategies in the classroom. Defining teachers' belief systems or identifying what they believe about certain aspects of teaching is important in defining what they do in the classroom and how they do it. Content area teachers' beliefs about teaching reading, whose responsibility it is, and what their role as a reading teacher might be are shaped by their pedagogical knowledge about teaching and learning. Challenging teachers to change in productive ways will be more successful if we understand their rationalization of the process of teaching (Hall, 2005).

Teacher Efficacy

Teacher efficacy refers to a teacher's belief that he or she can positively influence student learning regardless of learning difficulties and obstacles. Albert describes general teacher efficacy as the teacher's belief that in general teachers can and should greatly influence student achievement (Bandura, 1993). The belief of an individual teacher that he or she can make a difference in student achievement is referred to as personal efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Bandura goes on to further state that personal experiences with mastery and success have an immense impact on the efficacy of teachers. Efficacy is relevant and important to content literacy instruction. Research shows that middle and high school teachers value literacy instruction in the content areas but do not feel the level of effectiveness necessary to practice it (Hall, 2005).

Middle school content area teachers have certain beliefs and attitudes about teaching reading in the content area that play a role in shaping their level of efficacy. In 1977, Bandura provided a theoretical framework grounded in social cognitive theory for studying self-efficacy. He made the distinction between outcome expectation and efficacy expectation. A person's assumption that certain behaviors lead to certain outcomes is referred to as an outcome expectation. A person's certainty that they can successfully perform and attain certain outcomes is referred to as efficacy expectation (Yeo, Ang, Chong, Haun, & Quek, 2008). Personal teacher efficacy, or efficacy expectation, when applied to the field of teaching reflects personal feelings, beliefs, and attitudes of teachers. Bandura's research showed that teacher efficacy is context specific and related to teacher competence within the context of real world teaching duties and demands (Yeo et al., 2008). In 1993, Bandura showed that teacher's efficacy is related to student achievement by stating that "teachers' beliefs in their personal efficacy to motivate and promote learning impact the types of learning environments they create and the level of academic progress their students achieve" (p.117). If content area teachers believe in their personal ability to teach students who are below grade level in reading, they will have more success in doing so.

High Quality Instructors

Presley, White, and Gong (2005) showed in their study, *Examining the Distribution and Impact of Teacher Quality in Illinois*, that schools with high teacher quality indexes also had higher achieving students, especially in the categories of minority students and low socio-economic students. Research by Linda Darling-Hammond (1995) also shows that students who have "poor" teachers for more than one

year may never make up the ground they lose. William Sanders (1998) developed a system of assessment for schools and teachers to show academic gains over time. His research shows that if two different children of similar academic ability are assigned to an effective teacher, both will make gains. However, his research also indicates that if they are assigned to ineffective teachers the gains are reduced (Sanders & Horn, 1998). The goal of schools should be to hire the most qualified teachers according to student teaching performance, academic performance, content knowledge, and recommendations that give insight to the type of personality the teacher has. Some schools have implemented teaching a lesson as part of the job interview as a way to get a feel for how the teacher prepares and performs. When school leaders hire ineffective teachers, they have the responsibility to offer them options for professional development, give specific guidelines on improvement, or coach them to pursue other careers. With the stakes for learning continuing to increase, students deserve the best-qualified teachers regardless of race, sex, or socioeconomic status. Assigning the weakest students to the weakest teachers is not an effective way of closing the achievement gaps present in the educational system today, nor is it ethical (Haycock & Crawford, 2008).

These studies emphasize the importance of teacher quality in regards to students who are below grade level. Teachers of content area material such as science and social studies need to be effective high quality instructors in order for the lower level learners to make gains and be successful learners.

Preparing Content Teachers to Teach Reading

Preparing teachers to be high quality instructors is the responsibility of teacher preparation programs before teachers enter the field. Teacher preparation should include

a rigorous element of coursework and content preparation (Stronge, 2002). Child development courses, classroom management courses, and courses on how to properly assess and evaluate students should be included in the preparation programs. By providing a strong pedagogical foundation in education theory and methods, teachers have a greater understanding of their profession and how it relates to the real world of helping students. Teachers also need rigorous preparation in how to deliver content knowledge and skills to a variety of students with a variety of learning styles and backgrounds. Understanding the different learning levels of students, and learning how to teach students at various levels within the same classroom, are fundamental skills that teachers need in order to provide appropriate instruction (Tomlinson, 2000).

Planning is a crucial part of being able to deliver mastery level instruction. Careful, thought out planning will include challenging questions, will differentiate instruction for various levels and student interest, and will be focused on objectives. But at the same time, it will be flexible. Some research indicates that lesson plans and syllabi developed in classrooms are not designed with diversity in mind (Gorski, 2009).

Teacher certification is the focal point for many educational institutions due to the guidelines of NCLB (2001). According to NCLB, classrooms must have teachers who meet the NCLB definition of highly qualified. Thus, one would be lead to believe that certification alone is the key ingredient to being a successful teacher. State certification does offer specific guarantees such as completion of teacher preparation programs and graduation from accredited colleges and universities. Certified teachers have been shown to have higher impact on gains in student learning than uncertified teachers (Stronge, 2002). However, the procedures for teacher certification vary from state to state, and

alternate routes to teacher certification have been developed by states to allow “career switching.” Alternate routes of licensure often allow varying degrees of inconsistency in required coursework and fieldwork in order to obtain a certificate. Some argue that this produces less qualified teachers with certificates who have completed less formal and rigorous programs. Other studies show that teachers who have a strong reading instruction background from high quality universities are confident and successful. Also, teachers with strong reading education instruction are more effective in creating a literature rich environment for learning (Reading Today, 2003).

Most Effective Instructional Strategies

Classroom instruction is one of the most important factors in a student’s education. The way instruction is delivered, the attention given to individual student needs, and the effectiveness level of the teacher all play a part in the success of the instruction, but what are the most effective specific strategies teachers can use that boost academic performance?

NCLB (2001) called for schools to implement research-based strategies. Robert Marzano, Debra Pickering, and Jane Pollock, (2001), conducted a meta-analysis to compile research on instructional strategies and determine which are the most effective. This section of the literature review brings focus to their findings and the findings of others.

Similarities and Differences. Once students are able to identify similarities and differences, they are able to understand what something is and what it is not. Students should be taught to compare and contrast in all subject areas. For example, identifying the similarities of the causes of World War I versus the causes of World War II would

lend greater understanding to the material as opposed to learning about the wars as completely separate entities. Other ways of using similarities and differences in instruction include classifying, creating metaphors, and creating analogies (Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001). Identifying similarities and differences is a key reading skill that enables students to “hook” to previous learning and form new cognitive networks for learning.

Summarizing and Note Taking. Summarizing is a powerful tool in the classroom. It is a skill that students must be taught through explicit instruction and modeling. In order to summarize, students must be able to sort information and decide what information should be kept, exchanged and deleted. In order to do this, students must also be able to scrutinize the information that they have. One basic way to teach students to summarize material is to follow a set of rules. First, they should delete trivial material. Second, students should delete redundant material and substitute terms for lists. Students should also be able to focus on a topic sentence (Brown, Campione, & Day, 1981). Summaries can be oral, written, or visual diagrams. Summaries should answer the questions: What was the essence of what was read? What were the main points the author made? What was the organizational structure used in presentation (Neufeld, 2005)? Summarizing is an essential reading skill for both narrative and expository text. By teaching summarizing in content area classes, a student’s reading ability will improve across the curriculum, and a greater understanding of the content information will prevail.

Note taking is also a very effective way to help students gain information from content area texts. Teachers use note taking as a “tried and true” instructional technique in the classroom when instructing content area material. Teacher-prepared notes that

provide students with a clear picture of the objectives and expectations will yield the highest results for learning. Student note-taking takes the form of informal outlines, combination notes, webbing, and reciprocal teaching (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Marzano and colleagues' (2001) literature review of research also identified that verbatim note taking is the least effective way of taking notes, that notes should be considered a work in progress and used as study guide for tests, and that the more notes that are taken the better. Students who are taught to take notes as a reading strategy during the act of reading increase comprehension and build vocabularies thus increasing content area learning.

Reinforcement. Reinforcing students' attitudes and beliefs does not directly instruct the cognitive aspect; however, it does lend to learning gains in content areas by providing students with an increased awareness of the importance of their attitudes and beliefs. Teachers need to explicitly teach the importance of effort by showing the connection between efforts and achievement. This can easily be done by sharing examples of athletes, educators, politicians or personal stories based on success due to effort (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). It is also important for students to know that there is reward for newly attained and used knowledge. For some students, reward is intrinsic and the act of learning itself is enough. Other students need to be recognized on a different level. Some teachers believe that the reward for learning is the knowledge itself and therefore are reluctant to give extrinsic rewards and recognition. However, this is not always the case. Teachers need to be aware that rewards do not decrease the students' intrinsic desires to learn (Morgan, 1984). Reinforcement is especially

important for students who are below grade level readers. They often give up easily without support and encouragement.

Practice. Practicing skills is an excellent way to keep new learning fresh and all students to apply it across new situations. Practice can take the form of independent seat work, group work, review, or homework. Homework and practice can help students expand their comprehension as related to the content area material they have been taught (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Homework has a positive impact on student learning. While homework directly impacts student achievement at a higher rate for older students, younger students benefit as well. Homework increases study habits, parent communication, involvement, and attitudes (Cooper, Lindsay, Nye & Greathouse, 1998). To be a successful learning tool, homework should be age/grade appropriate, involve parents minimally, and have a clearly communicated purpose. The teacher should give meaning and value to the homework assignments by commenting on them. (Marzano, et al., 1998).

Practicing a skill is a key to mastery. Students should be afforded opportunities to practice skills, whether they are content skills or reading skills as a way to shape and adapt what they learn.

Non-linguistic Representations. Non-linguistic representations are powerful teaching tools. Graphs, charts, physical models, organizers, webs, timelines, sequencing charts, and pictographs are all examples of non-linguistic representations of learning. Non-linguistic representations are visual learning tools that activate a different part of the brain than auditory learning does. Visual learning and imagery has a greater rate of gain pertaining to learning than reading the material alone (Pressley, Symons, McDaniel,

Snyder & Turnure, 1988). This is important for content teachers to know and understand. Using non-linguistic representations as teaching and learning tools will aid in content comprehension and learning.

Cooperative Learning. Cooperative learning is an instructional strategy often used by teachers in which students are placed in small groups of two or more to complete tasks, projects, or other learning objectives. According to Johnson and Johnson (1999), in order for cooperative learning to be effective, the cooperative groups must function according to the five defining elements of cooperative learning:

1. Positive interdependence – sink or swim together
2. Face to face promotive interaction – helping each other and applauding success
3. Individual and group accountability – each contributing to the goals of the group
4. Interpersonal and small group skills – communication, trust, leadership, decision making and conflict resolution
5. Group processing – reflecting on how well the group is working together and how it can improve

One person cannot be the leader of the group; rather, students must function as a team. The goal of the grouping should be that each student helps the others learn by contributing to the group. Group dynamics such as leadership, decision-making, responsibility, and conflict resolution will play a part in the product and learning of the students so teachers should group students for success. Cooperative learning groups give teachers many possibilities and options for student learning. Grouping should remain flexible and be used appropriately but not over-used.

Setting Objectives and Providing Feedback. Setting goals or objectives is a life skill that students need to be taught not only to gain knowledge from content material, but to plan and prepare for their futures. Teachers who set goals and objectives for students and communicate those goals and objectives will have a successful classroom. Setting goals narrows the focus without making instruction too specific. Feedback is another crucial learning tool identified by Marzano's (2001) meta-analysis. Feedback provides students with information about what they are learning, how they are learning it, and how it applies to their world – past, present, and future. Feedback must be corrective in nature, timely, specific, and allow students to critique their own work (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001).

Generating and Testing Hypotheses. Being able to generate and test hypotheses is an application skill. It occurs quite naturally in many situations throughout the academic school day. These skills can be instructed both inductively and deductively using general rules for drawing conclusions or drawing conclusions based on the information available. When students are taught to do this in content areas and practice it, more learning occurs (Lavoie, 1999). Teachers need to ask students to develop and explain their theories and conclusions. Through generating theories and hypotheses, students will gain more knowledge in the skills of problem solving, investigation, invention, inquiry, and decision-making. Just as reading can be taught in all content areas, creating and testing theories and hypotheses can as well. In *Classroom Instruction that Works*, Marzano (2001) states that by teaching students the basics of system analysis, problem solving, historical investigation, invention, experimental inquiry, and decision making, they will be better at generating and testing hypothesis.

Questioning. As learning occurs, it is important that teachers are skilled in ways to assess the learning, activate prior knowledge, and engage students in using what they have learned or know. Teachers need to be able to ask questions that focus on the critical information and that are asked at higher levels. Higher levels of questions will elicit more critical thinking than lower level purely factual questions. Cues and questions should be focused on what is critical to the topic being studied (Alexander & Judy, 1998). Teachers should not assume that their questions based on what they find interesting about the topic will increase the student's interest in the topic.

Higher level questions require students to restructure the information they have learned and make connections to material that may have been previously learned; therefore, Marzano (2001) suggests that research by Redfield and Rousseau (1981) shows that higher-level questioning produces somewhat more learning than lower level questions.

Questioning in the classroom can be enhanced by the appropriate use of wait time. Wait time is identified by the pause between teacher and student interaction. When teachers use a wait time of more than 3 seconds during questioning, teachers and students are provided with more time to think, which facilitates higher-level cognitive learning (Tobin, 1987). Often teachers use questioning as a pre-instructional activity. Asking questions ahead of time or before a learning experience will give students cues and establish a foundation for students, enabling students to better process and comprehend the learning (Pressley, et al., 1992). Additionally, student generated questions increase elaboration, motivation, and enhance learning. Students who are involved in the process

of self guided questioning, or peer questioning show improvements in comprehension as well as signs of higher level cognition (King, 1992).

Scaffolding. Scaffolding activities include preparation activities that build upon one another as the lesson and the learning progress. For example, providing “getting ready to read strategies” such as clarifying the purpose, previewing the text, providing background knowledge, and making predictions would be a beginning scaffolding activity. Following up with during and after reading strategies such as identifying text structure, creating summaries, and assessing comprehension would be a second phase of the scaffolding (Neufeld, 2005).

Science and Social Studies Instruction

One of the problems with content area reading is that the textbooks are often scored by the readability formulas at higher reading levels than the grade levels for which they are prepared. Readability.com is a website that offers information on several readability tests used commonly for assessing the reading ease of texts. One of the measures mentioned is the Fry Test of Readability developed by Edward Fry in 1968. Originally, he created a measure that assessed the level of texts through high school. He later extended the measure to include the lower primary grades. The Fry measure takes into account the number of sentences and syllables per the first, second and third 100 words in a text. This information is graphed and used to determine the readability of the text. The more multi-syllable words, the higher the text is leveled, and as content progresses through grades, there are more multi-syllable vocabulary words in the texts. Therefore, it is often the vocabulary of the text and content area that will cause students to struggle. Helping students decode the vocabulary, understand it in context, and find

real life connections is the reading function of content area teachers. Teachers should use literacy strategies associated with reading in all content areas (Jones, 2006).

In order for students to be able to comprehend the content area material, they need to understand what the text is about, what they already know about it, what the author is trying to say, what is going to happen next, and what the author means. Pursuing meaning in text is an example of an effective reader, while ineffective readers don't understand that they play a role in the comprehension of the text (Barton, 1997). Currently, reading skills are mostly taught at the elementary school level. A common complaint of middle and high school content teachers is that the students cannot read the content texts. Students need to learn to be strategic readers, and teachers need to be able to teach them the strategies to become such. These strategies focus on background knowledge, text features and metacognitive knowledge. Without strategy instruction, students will not successfully comprehend the content material (Dole, Brown, & Trathen, 1996).

Another factor that will increase student's understanding of content area material and texts is the types of conversations the teachers and students have with each other about the material and about the instruction. Exemplary teachers create engaging classrooms where students are learning to read, write, and think about the content they are studying. Engaging students in conversation about the learning and content plays a critical role in student comprehension by allowing students to make connections and become "part" of the instruction (Allington & Johnston, 2000).

Content area teachers should be able to implement the most effective teaching strategies as described previously in order to help students who are not able to read the grade level text comprehend and learn the material.

Summary

Throughout the literature review, there were some common reoccurring themes. The literature suggested that high quality teachers do what is needed to teach reading in the content area and that they make it part of their daily lessons as they see it as a key to successful learning. The literature also suggested that using the most effective teaching strategies in content-based classes will lend to teaching reading skills in the content area. Appropriate training of preservice and inservice teachers is another theme that was established in the literature. Providing quality instruction on teaching reading in the content area as part of preservice teacher education programs enable teachers to feel more capable of teaching reading. Thus reading instruction in the content areas will become part of their pedagogical beliefs and practices. The literature suggested that inservice teachers who are provided real professional development training can change the way they teach as long as the central focus remains on the content area objectives. Finally, the literature revealed that the level teacher efficacy in teaching reading in the content areas is shown to have an impact of the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of content teachers. This study will seek to identify whether the participants beliefs and attitudes as well as the instructional strategies they use when instructing below level learners are consistent with current literature and research. Empirical gaps between the findings and the literature will be discussed.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter describes the theoretical framework, the goals, the questions, the procedures and the design used in data collection for the study of content area reading. It also describes the site, participants, researcher perspective, data collection and data analysis for the study. Finally, this chapter identifies ethical and validity concerns that are common to qualitative research and specific to this study.

The qualitative approach was selected for this study as a way to provide an insightful and thorough investigation of attitudes, beliefs of content area teachers, and strategies they use in regards to teaching below level learners. A qualitative study is not limited by predetermined categories or measures but lends itself to openness and allows for depth and discovery. Qualitative research does not isolate phenomena; therefore, meaning and ideas are allowed to emerge (Patton, 2002).

This study applies the phenomenological method of inquiry with empirical data collection methods. Phenomenology is a philosophy that was initiated by Edmund Husserl in 1900. Amadeo (1997) declared that “the phenomenological method of inquiry has three elements: a) reduction, b) description, and c) search for essences (p.237).” By applying these methods to the study, the researcher attained a larger volume of data, reduced it to a manageable amount, described it based on common characteristics, and searched for commonalities and meaning within it. MacLeod (as cited in Giorgi, 2010) described the use of phenomenology in psychology as the “systematic attempt to observe and describe all characteristics of phenomena as presented.” Specific prescriptive

methods and procedures are not definitive within the phenomenological method of inquiry; however, the methods used in a phenomenological study should be recorded so that the experiment or study can be repeated. When employing the phenomenological method of inquiry, following a specific scientific procedure while maintaining individual adaptability is also encouraged (Giorgi, 2006). The phenomenological inquiry begins with silence in order to grasp what is being studied by bracketing the information. Phenomenology is used to gain entry to and understanding of the world of the informants or participants. Phenomenology is a method of inquiry that creates an opportunity for the participants' voices to be heard (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The researcher had to minimize interaction and presence so that the experiences of the subject can be known.

In this study, the researcher found out from the participants what they believe about teaching reading in the content area, including insight to their attitudes and the strategies that enable below level students to learn in the content areas.

Pilot Study

A limited pilot study was conducted in order to determine the feasibility of the study and to determine what, if any, modifications needed to be made to the methodology and design of the larger study. Marshall and Rossman (2006) suggest that pilot studies can be used to refine research instruments and foreshadow possible research problems and questions. Additionally, the pilot study provided an an opportunity to understand the process as well as demonstrate the worthiness and significance of the study.

The pilot study consisted of a three-stage interview session using a series of open-ended questions. The first interview session focused on the professional life and history of the participant; the second phase focused on how the participant performs in the

classroom and why the participant instructs in a particular way; and the third phase of the interview focused on tying the first two phases together in a meaningful context. All interview sessions were audio recorded. Two content area teachers were selected for the pilot study that was conducted prior to the larger study. IRB approval was gained and pilot study data was collected. The data collected in the pilot study was not included in the larger study. Both teachers in the pilot study volunteered to participate and are not associated with any of the three schools that are sites for the larger study. The first teacher selected for the pilot is a US History teacher with fifteen years of experience; the other is a science teacher with three years of experience. Both have master's degrees in teaching.

I met with the pilot study participants one at a time, gained consent for their participation, had the participants complete the survey, and then set up a time for the interviews. After the participants completed the survey and the researcher analyzed the data it produced by making a chart and tallying the answers to each question. It was decided that the survey questions would not be modified for the larger study. Once the interviews were conducted, the audio recorded responses were transcribed. At this point, it was determined that the interviews could be conducted in one session as opposed to three separate sessions. The interview remained a three-part interview gathering several types of information, but did not require three separate meetings. Limiting the interview to one longer session as opposed to three sessions was also suggested by the pilot participants as a way of making participation in the study more attractive.

The pilot study served as rehearsal for the larger study. It was determined that the interview questions would be used as a guide or a framework rather than a strict design

due to the fact that the participants in the pilot study provided much more information beyond the original interview questions. The detailed responses given by the pilot participants lead me to reduce the structure of the interview to allow more of the participant's voice to be heard. By setting up the less structured interview, the participants felt more at ease and voiced their experiences. They added detail as opposed to answering the interview questions with single words or phrases. With the less structured interview, the participants were able to elaborate on their experiences making the data gathered richer and more in-depth. Evidence of this reduction of structure can be found in the transcriptions of the interviews in the appendix section. The pilot study implemented all aspects of the larger study except for the observation. Data that was gathered from the pilot study assisted the researcher in further development of the timelines for the enhanced study.

Theoretical Framework

This study drew on the theoretical orientation of constructivists and their learning theories. The constructivists' theories support the process of learning as being based on previously gained knowledge and experience. Constructivists believe that learning engages the entire physiology, not just the intellect, and that the brain processes information in individual parts as well as whole units (Huitt, 2003). Students learn better when neither parts nor whole units are omitted from instruction. Experiential learning is the most effective, according to constructivists. The experiential learning theory was applied to this study as a way to make connections between the experiences that teachers have had as young students, college students, student teachers, and as inservice teachers to the way they teach as well as their beliefs and attitudes about teaching. The main

focus of the constructivist theory is that nothing is learned from scratch; instead, all learning builds on previous learning or knowledge (Caine & Caine, 1991). Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky are constructivists whose beliefs are relevant to this study are.

Jean Piaget. Jean Piaget's 1972 theory on the development of logical thinking in children suggests that children pass through various stages in their mental development. Piaget believed that people use the processes of assimilation and accommodation throughout their lives in order to adapt to their surroundings or learning conditions. Assimilation is described as the process of using what is in the environment, placing it in preexisting cognitive structures, and applying it to new conditions. Accommodation is described as the process of changing the cognitive structures in order to accept something from the new environment. Both become more complex as learning environments and demands change and are organized in a hierarchical manner (Huitt, & Hummel, 2003). Piaget further developed his theory by describing the Stages of Cognitive Development as shown below in Table 1.

Table 1

Stages of Cognitive Development (Huitt & Hummel, 2003)

Stages	Description
Sensory Motor Stage (infancy)	This stage has six stages of its own. Intelligence is demonstrated through motor activity without symbols, knowledge of the world is limited and developing (but is based on physical experiences). Children acquire object permanence or memory at about 7 months of age. Physical development in the form of mobility allows the child to begin developing new intellectual abilities. Some symbolic language abilities are developed near the end of this stage.

Pre-Operational stage	Intelligence is demonstrated by the use of symbols, and the use of language matures. Memory and imagination are developed, but cognition is nonlogical. Egocentric thinking dominates.
Concrete operational stage	Intelligence is demonstrated through logical and systematic manipulation of symbols related to concrete objects. Operational thinking is developing, and mental actions become reversible. Egocentric thinking is present, but is diminishing.
Formal operational stage	Intelligence is demonstrated through the logical use of symbols related to abstract concepts. Early in this period egocentrism returns.

Discovery learning and developmental teaching are two primary instructional strategies that have foundations in Piaget's learning theory. Research based on the cognitive development theory implies that there is significant importance in determining students' cognitive capabilities in order to structure educational tasks that are compatible with their developmental level. Research based on this theory also emphasizes that learning is a highly active process in which students are involved in constructing knowledge rather than just receiving or ingesting it as provided by the teacher (Ary, 2006). This study showed the direct application of Piaget's beliefs to the strategy selection of the participants depending on the cognitive level of their students.

Lev Vygotsky. Lev Vygotsky (1978) focused the central beliefs of his learning theory on the social aspect of learning, or learning in groups, unlike Piaget, who focused on the learning of the individual. Vygotsky believed that learning can occur within communities, not just individually, and that with proper instruction students learn and move through a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky believed that the role of educators is to provide children with experiences which match their ZPD, thus

promoting their individual learning. According to Vygotsky, the ZPD is the natural development model students will move through. They enter the ZPD with some knowledge, gain assistance in areas where their skills are weak or there is limited knowledge, and then move into areas that are unknown to them. This study showed the implication of Vygotsky's ZPD by recording data gathered from observations of group interactions.

Goals of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe the attitudes, beliefs, and instructional strategies that 12 content area teachers use in their classrooms when instructing below grade level readers. This study provided a window to the experiences that shape the attitudes, beliefs, and instructional strategies of teachers who teach reading in the content areas. It examined life experiences, teaching experiences, and relationship experiences that influenced current inservice content area teachers. Upon completion, this study provided valuable information about teaching reading in the content area to students who are below grade level in reading. The research offered insight from varying teacher perspectives concerning teacher readiness in regard to teaching reading in the content area to students who are below grade level and provided information for school divisions regarding the need for professional development for teaching reading in the content area.

Research Questions

By developing a set of sound research questions, it was easier to bracket or characterize the information gathered from the participants. The research questions assisted the emphasis placed on different aspects of the study and additionally maintained

focus on the limited scope of the study. In order to understand the phenomena of teaching reading in the content area, the following research questions were proposed:

1. What are teachers' beliefs about teaching reading in the content area to students who are below grade level readers?
2. What are teachers' attitudes towards teaching reading in the content area to students who are below grade level readers?
3. What are the strategies teachers are using to teach below grade level students content material?
4. What challenges do content area teachers face when teaching content material to students who are below grade level?

Design of the Study

The research topic was selected and edited several times with the help of colleagues and experts in the field to better define the purpose and focus. The final topic of research was determined based upon personal experiences, knowledge, and interests. Research questions were then developed based on the researcher's prior knowledge and personal questions pertaining to the topic and its application to the educational field. The research questions were formulated as a way to define the focus of the study. After developing the research questions, the appropriate research paradigm and methodology were selected. The selection of the research method was based on an investigation of similar previous studies and in-depth reading about qualitative inquiry. The researcher wished to gain information from content area teachers in their own words in an open-ended manner. Therefore, phenomenology was selected as the method of inquiry. Amedeo Giorgi (2006) is an expert in the field of phenomenology, and his work was read

and cited. The phenomenological approach allows the researcher to gain information through a representative lens by allowing a complete view of the experiences participants have with reading in the content area. The researcher gained a better understanding of the participants' beliefs, attitudes and strategies by constructing the experiences that formed the beliefs, attitudes, and use of strategies.

Once the selection criterion for participants was developed, maximum variation sampling was used. Maximum variation sampling is purposeful and represents a variety of experience related to the phenomenon being studied. The goal when using maximum variation sampling is to represent a range of experiences as opposed to building a random sample (Maykut & Morehouse, 2000). The participants were asked to give consent to participate in the study. Data was then collected through surveys, interviews, observations, and document examination once Internal Review Board (IRB) approval was gained. Collected data was sorted and organized in ways that illustrated an emergence of common themes. The data was collected, labeled and stored in a safe place to reduce the risks of destruction and loss and to maintain confidentiality. Finally, the data was analyzed using triangulation, coding, and member checks. Findings were interpreted and reported as they relate to the academic literature, practice, and future research.

This study sought to add to the existing body of knowledge pertaining to teaching reading in the content areas, specifically to students who are below grade level readers. The phenomenological method supported the consideration of content area teachers individually and collectively.

Sites

Three middle schools were chosen to serve as sites for the study. Due to the nature of the study and the need for content area teachers as participants, middle schools were the appropriate choice for site data collection. The selection of the middle schools was based on the researcher's preference. A search was performed through the Virginia Department of Education's website to locate school divisions within one hour's driving distance from my location. Once the school districts were identified, the superintendents were sent a letter via e-mail to gain permission to conduct research within their school systems. Next, the principal's of the middle schools within the divisions were contacted by phone by the researcher to gain permission to work within the schools. The criteria for the school selection included:

- 1) the researcher would not have a personal relationship with any of the participants,
- 2) the schools be outside of the district where the researcher is an administrator, and
- 3) the schools be outside of the district where the researcher's husband is an administrator.

The first middle school was located in a suburban area near southwest Virginia. The school is nestled in a neighborhood setting with residential surroundings. The administration of the school consists of one principal and one assistant principal. The principal has served in his current position for five years and describes his staff as hard working, dedicated, and very caring (Personal communication, April 4, 2011). The total student population of this school is 715 students. The total staff including custodians,

cafeteria, SRO, aides and teachers is 85. The total number of certified teachers is 61. The percentage of free/reduced lunches (or poverty measure) of this school is 19%.

The second middle school is located in a rural setting near southwest Virginia. There is one principal and one assistant principal. Both have served in their current positions for six years. The principal describes his staff as wonderful, caring and very smart (Personal communication, April 14, 2011). The total student population is 350, and the total staff including custodians, cafeteria, SRO, aides and teachers is 55 with 37 being certified teachers. The poverty measure for this school is 43%.

The third middle school in the study is also the smallest in the study. It is located in a rural farm setting near southwest Virginia. The principal has been in his current position for 15 years. He describes his staff as “the best” (Personal communication, April 5, 2011). The total student population is 204 with 34 staff members. Twenty four of the staff members are certified teachers. The poverty measure for this school is 43%.

Each middle school selected for the study had a departmentalized curriculum and the content area teachers are responsible for teaching single subjects. All three of the middle schools selected for the study had reading specialists specifically designated for teaching below level readers precise skills to help improve their reading ability.

Participants and Sampling

Twelve participants were selected for the study using maximum variation sampling. The first step in selecting the participants was selecting the school divisions. Three school divisions were selected based on their geographic location to the researcher. The school divisions needed to be located within one-hour driving distance for convenience. Next, a letter was sent as an e-mail attachment to the superintendents of the

school divisions requesting permission to contact individual middle schools and conduct research in the middle schools. It was decided to use three middle schools in two different school divisions. Once permission was received from the superintendents, individual middle schools within the school divisions were contacted. School participation was on a volunteer basis. The principal's of each of the three selected sites were asked to help solicit volunteers for the study by asking their science and social studies teachers if they would be interested. Once the principals had made the original request of the teachers, they were contacted via e-mail by the researcher. Once the teachers had agreed to be participants, they were contacted by phone and the study was explained to them. Next they were sent the consent form along with the survey. The survey was returned either by e-mail or fax to the researcher and then an observation and interview time and date was established.

The participants provided a number of perspectives from different content disciplines and from different experience levels. Teachers with varied levels of experience added depth to the study. The participants included in the study were sixth through eighth grade science or social studies teachers with an endorsement in the area they taught. Finally, the participants in the study were all considered highly qualified by the Virginia Department of Education.

Data collection methods were triangulated to ensure depth and quality during the investigation (Ary et al., 2006). Each teacher participated in completion of a survey, an interview, and was observed within the classroom instructional setting. Additionally, each participant was asked to share a lesson plan that reflected teaching practices in the content area. The experience of teaching explicit content that the participants have is

important to the phenomena being researched; therefore content area teachers were the appropriate selection for studying teaching reading in the content area.

Data to be gathered for participants. The data that was reported on all 12 participants was collected through the interview. The data as shown in Table 2, includes the grade and subject they teach, years teaching experience, and degrees they have earned. Each teacher also completed an attitudes and beliefs assessment survey pertaining to reading in the content areas. Data from this survey helped to frame the findings regarding the beliefs and attitudes of the participants towards teaching reading in the content area and helped shape the researchers understanding of the classroom practices in regards to the attitudes and beliefs.

Table 2

Participant Overview

Pseudonym	Content taught	Grade Taught	Experience	Degree
John	U.S. History II	6 th	15	M.A.
Jack	civics and reading	6 th	4	B.A.
Elizabeth	U.S. History II	7 th	19	M.A.
Julie	science	6 th	26	B.A.
Donna	civics	7 th	25	B.A.
Sarah	science	6 th	14	B.A.
Charlie	U.S. History I	6 th	10	M.A.
Dolly	science	6 th	18	B.A.
Gretchen	science	7 th	10	B.A.
Kim	U.S. History II	6 th	13	B.A.
Mary	civics	7 th	18	M.A.
Debi	U.S. History I	6 th	10	M.A.

Data Collection

The proposal received approval from the Institutional Review Board on November 30, 2010. Once IRB approval was received, the researcher began contacting school divisions via letters and e-mail, and then contacted individual schools in order to gain permission to collect data. Data was gathered through surveys, interviews with participants, classroom observations and examination of documents over a two-month period. Once the participants had been secured, the researcher obtained consent from the participating teachers and sent the survey via e-mail attachment to be completed. As the surveys were returned, the results were recorded in a tally format on a blank survey form. The tallied survey information was used to help define the beliefs and attitudes of the participants towards teaching reading in the content area. Next, the researcher contacted each participant and scheduled interview and observation dates. The majority of the communication between the researcher and participants prior to meeting was conducted through e-mail correspondence. All observations and interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience; however, since travel was involved, several observations and interviews were often scheduled on the same day. Interviews took place either before or after the observation depending on the individual teachers schedule and preference. The interviews took place either in the classroom, absent of students, or in a private office. The participants were given an oral explanation of the three phase interview process before recording began and were asked if they had any questions regarding the interview process. All interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed by the researcher. Once transcribed, the taped sessions were reviewed for accuracy. Field notes were taken during each hour long observation. The field notes were then transferred onto the

observation form developed by the researcher in order to sort and classify the events that were observed. Documents such as lesson plans, class work, graphic organizers, and interactive notes were collected during the observations and were sorted and coded by the type of activity. Data collection provided the researcher with the information needed to gain an understanding of the practices content teachers implement when instructing students who are below grade level. The data also gave further insight to the pedagogy of those practices in relation to the beliefs and attitudes of the teachers.

Surveys. Open-ended surveys were administered to the participating teachers as a way to assess their attitudes and beliefs about teaching reading in the content area. The survey that was used was modeled after the Gilbert and Gibbs (1998) Teaching Methods Inventory (Coffey & Gibbs, 2002). The survey assessed the teachers beliefs by asking questions similar to those asked in Leigh A. Hall's (2004) study titled, "Teachers and content area reading: Attitudes, beliefs, and change." Specifically, teachers were asked to rank their beliefs about teaching reading in the content area based on a Likert scale with one indicating that they strongly disagree with the statement, two meaning they disagree with the statement, three meaning that they agree with the statement, and four meaning that they strongly agree with the statement. Teachers participating in the study completed the following survey:

- I. Content area teachers do not have the time to teach reading.
- II. Content area teachers do not have the training to teach reading.
- III. Content area teachers do not have the responsibility to teach reading.
- IV. Teaching reading is important.
- V. Teaching reading in content areas is important.

- VI. I teach reading in my content area.
- VII. I do not have the ability to teach reading in my content area.
- VIII. I do not have the time to teach reading in my content area.
- IX. I do not have the training to teach reading in my content area.
- X. I do not feel that teaching reading is my responsibility.
- XI. My teacher preparation program fully prepared me to teach reading in the content area.
- XII. I am confident in my ability to teach reading in the content area.

Interviews. Interviewing was used as the primary data collection tool for gathering information regarding background information, past experiences, beliefs about instruction, and classroom practices. For this research project, the interviews were conducted in one three-part setting. The first phase of the interview focused on the participants' life history and experience with reading in the content area and the instruction of below grade level readers. Participants were asked to tell as much as they could about their past experiences as a student, preservice teacher, and inservice teacher and how they came to be a content area teacher. The second phase of the interview focused on information about what the participants actually do in the classroom to teach science or social studies. Participants were asked to describe their specific roles and responsibilities and to define specific strategies they use to teach. Participants also described their instructional day, how it is organized, and the composition of their specific classes. The third phase of the interview session concentrated on constructing meaning from the history provided in the first two phases of the interview. Participants were asked to reflect on their discussion from the two previous interview phases and to

describe how their experiences have molded them to believe and teach the way they do. Each interview lasted from 30 to 90 minutes long (Seidman, 1998). Interviews in phenomenological research are not designed to answer specific questions, to test hypothesis, or to evaluate. Rather, the interviews are designed to help the researcher gain an understanding of the experiences of others and the meaning they construct from those experiences (Seidman, 1998).

In order to understand the phenomena that make up teacher beliefs and attitudes about teaching reading in the content areas and the reasons for the instructional strategies they select, the researcher had to gain insight to the participants' experiences. Phenomenological interviews combine life history interviewing with focused in-depth interviewing consisting of mostly open-ended questions. The questions build on participant answers and explore responses, with the goal of having the participant reconstruct his or her experiences with the topic. Finally, this model of interviewing provided a structure and give context to the research. An example of the three phase interview that was used is shown below:

Three Phase Interview Structure

Part I

The first phase interview gathered data about the participants' life history and experience with reading in the content area and the instruction of below grade level readers. Demographic data was also collected during the first phase of the interview and participants were asked to tell as much as they could about their past experiences as a student, preservice teacher, and inservice teacher and how they came to be a content area teacher. Guiding questions for the first phase of the interview included but were not

limited to:

- I. How long have you been a teacher?
- II. What is your highest degree?
- III. What was your major in college?
- IV. What subject (content area) do you teach?
- V. How do you remember learning material in that content area?
- VI. Were you a good reader as a middle school student?
- VII. How did you learn to read?

The second phase of the interview gathered information on what the content teachers do in the classroom. Participants were asked about their roles and responsibilities as a teacher. Guiding questions included but were not limited to:

- I. Describe your roles and responsibilities as a content teacher.
- II. Describe the classes you teach.
- III. Describe what your day looks like (including schedules, duties, expectations, etc.)
- IV. Do you have below level readers in your content classes?
- V. What strategies do you use to teach below grade level readers the content material?
- VI. What support do you get in working with below level readers?

The third phase of the interview collected essential information expected to help the researcher construct meaning from the history provided in the first two interviews. Participants were asked to reflect on their discussion from the two previous interviews and describe how their experiences have molded them to believe and teach the way they

do. At the end of the interview each participant was asked if there was anything else they would like to add about reading in the content area or reading instruction at the middle school. This questions was added as a way to elicit a more free flowing conversation from the participant as a result of the pilot study and at the suggestion of a pilot study participant.

Observations. Observation is another fundamental type of data collection for qualitative research. Observation is global, giving the researcher insight into the activities of the participants in their natural setting. For this research project, the observer acted as participatory observer in that there was some interaction with the participants with the purpose of establishing rapport, but the researcher did not become involved in the activities of the group. According to Rossman and Rallis (1997), observation takes you inside the setting and facilitates the discovery of the complexity of a situation by actually being there. Observation is a mode used to record events, actions, and interactions. Observations can be either tightly configured by using structured and detailed notations or checklists, or they can be holistic by providing descriptions of events and activities (Rossman & Rallis, 1997). This researcher used holistic observational methods absent of checklists in order to discover patterns and relationships among instructional techniques in the classrooms observed.

Field notes. Taking field notes is the most common method of recording data collected during observations. This researcher took meticulous field notes during the observations and expanded on them during personal reflective time after the observations. The field notes described the class, the content being taught, the instructional strategies being used, the behaviors of students and participants, and the time and attention given to

students. All field notes were dated and time stamped and the participants were given the opportunity to member check the field notes for accuracy and to ensure validity immediately following the observation. Only two participants asked to member check the field notes immediately following the observation.

Audiotaping. The researcher audiotaped the 12 three-part interviews as a way to ensure accuracy during data analysis. The audiotape recorder is an efficient way of gathering the data that is non-intrusive and accurate as it provides a verbatim record of the responses (Ary, 2006). The data gathered from the interviews was transcribed verbatim and the participants were offered an opportunity to member check the transcriptions.

Document examination. The documents that were studied included tests, quizzes, notes, lesson plans, and any written assignment completed during the classroom observation. As the teachers passed out notes, tests, and assignments to the students, a copy was requested for the research project as well. The copies that were examined during data analysis did not contain any student information or data. They were not examined for student content, but for design and type of activity so the blank documents served the purpose well. Document analysis allowed an additional look into the way the participants attitudes and beliefs influences their classroom instruction. The documents used were primary sources written by the participants themselves and therefore provided valid descriptive information. According to Ary (2006), the documents examination is a way to ensure a stable source of data while helping to ground the study in its context.

Triangulation

The trustworthiness of qualitative research is usually based on two factors: whether or not the research conforms to the standards of acceptable and competent practice, and whether or not the research has been ethically conducted (Rossman & Rallis, 1997). Triangulation, or confirming the data using multiple procedures of data collection, is a way to increase the trustworthiness or dependability of the research. Therefore, the triangulation in data collection of this research project included surveys, interviews, observations, and document analysis. Triangulation allowed for a stronger case to be made regarding findings and recommendations since the multiple sources come to the same conclusions and produced similar commonalities.

Additionally, participants were asked to member check, or study the accuracy of the recorded experiences, which also contributed to the trustworthiness of the research (Ary, 2006). The participants were not asked to check the analysis and conclusions, only the accuracy of the observations recorded. Only two of the participants selected to member check the notes. The implementation of audit trails further allows the study to be replicated and will provide a safeguard for the researcher. An audit log was kept to help organize the research and the timelines for activities conducted by the researcher. The audit log will assist in duplication of the study.

Data Analysis

In an empirical phenomenological study, the researcher identifies themes, brackets out experiences, collects data from those who have had the experiences and then analyzes the data. The purpose of data analysis is to reduce the information into themes, quotes and statements and then combine them to form a textual description of the phenomena (Creswell, J., Hansen, W., Clark Plano, V., Morales, A., 2007). The interviews and were

audiotaped and diligently transcribed by the researcher. Next, they were coded according to the procedures set up and described by Moustakas (Creswell, J., Hansen, W., Clark Plano, V., Morales, A. 2007) for shared experiences, beliefs and other commonalities. Notations were also made of the differences among the participants' experiences as they also played a role in constructing actual classroom practice. During the observations the researcher used two-column memoing to facilitate the separation of the comments and opinions of the participant from the observations of the researcher. The two column memoing further helped to reduce researcher bias when analyzing the observations. The open-ended teacher surveys were open coded as were the observations, audio-tapes, and documents. Open coding enabled the researcher to be flexible in the search of common themes presented in the data and common practices as identified in the literature review. As themes emerged from the data collection and analysis, and coding process they were identified and recorded. As the study progressed the need for two-tier or axial coding arose, giving the researcher additional opportunity to categorize the data and identify core themes. For example, all document examination revealed some type of interactive note taking strategy. The documents were coded as interactive notes, and then were further examined to see if they were student generated or teacher generated notes.

Trustworthiness

Establishing dependability, credibility, and transferability of the study was important in order for the study to be meaningful, accomplish its purpose, and perhaps be duplicated. In order to establish dependability, the data was coded on more than one level. Open coding was used as the initial classifier, but axial coding was used to further organize the data. Credibility was established through member checks, methodological

triangulation, and use of a specific interview technique. Only two participants selected to member check the transcribed interviews; however, the researcher member checked each transcription for accuracy after typing them. Methodological triangulation refers to the convergence of data from multiple sources. This added to the credibility of the study by providing more than one data source for the findings. Transferability was ensured with the use of audit trails. A notebook of all activities, correspondence, and meetings was kept for the research project. The notebook also indicates the steps followed by the researcher for all data collection and analysis. Further, trustworthiness was established by specific behaviors of the researcher during data collection. The researcher played the part of the listener and limited personal comments and digressions which allowed the participants to maintain focus on the topic and the questions during the interviews. All data was recorded accurately and analyzed in a timely manner, and all data that was collected was included in the report.

Ethical Issues

This study examined the attitudes, beliefs and instructional strategies used by content teachers specifically in relation to teaching reading in the content area to students who are below grade level. The individual teachers were primary focus of the research; therefore careful measures were taken to respect their confidentiality and identity. Each participant was made aware of the intentions, scope and procedures of this research project. All IRB procedures and instructions were followed. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants, and member checking allowed participants to review transcripts and check for accuracy before any data was reported.

Summary

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe the attitudes, beliefs and instructional practices of content area teachers, through their experiences, when teaching students who are below grade level readers. Research questions were developed and data was gathered from 12 participants in the form of a three-phase interview, observations, surveys, and document examination. The participants teach either sixth or seventh grade. The compilation of survey results, transcripts of interviews, notes from observations and document examination were coded and classified by common emerging themes. Insight into how content area teachers feel about teaching reading in their content classes to students who are below grade level, as well as how they do it was provided by the data.

Problems with teaching reading in the content area to below-level readers were identified. Content area teachers' levels of efficacy for teaching reading skills were also identified along with some challenges that they face. This information carries powerful possibilities for instructional reform. The research gathered enable future research to focus on specific aspects of instructional strategies and professional development, as well as classroom success for students and teachers.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe the attitudes, beliefs, and instructional strategies content area teachers use to instruct below grade level readers. The research method selected was phenomenology.

Phenomenological studies gather data and develop meaning based on the “voice” of the participants (Giorgi, 2010). The findings are derived through the lens in which the researcher may view the data as it relates to the topic of study or the phenomenon. In phenomenological studies the ideas and assumptions of the researcher are not ignored, but are implanted in the study and are essential to the interpretation of the data (Patton, 2002). In this research project, great care was taken to precisely report the interview experiences and classroom observations, as well as present the data and findings with accuracy.

Research Questions

The study was designed to answer questions regarding the phenomenon of content area teachers’ beliefs and attitudes towards reading in the content area, and to explore specific instructional strategies that are used to teach students who are below grade level readers. The specific questions were:

1. What are teachers’ beliefs about teaching reading in the content area to students who are below grade level readers?
2. What are teachers’ attitudes towards teaching reading in the content area to students who are below grade level readers?

3. What are the strategies teachers are using to teach below grade level students content material?
4. What challenges do content area teachers face when teaching content material to students who are below grade level?

In particular, the research purpose was to discover and describe the attitudes, beliefs, and instructional strategies employed by the content area teachers and to identify common themes among them.

Participants

The participants for the study were purposefully selected based on the content area and the grade levels that they currently teach. First, the researcher contacted the superintendents of the participating schools to gain permission to conduct research within the school system. Second, the researcher contacted the principals of the selected middle schools to explain the study and to ask permission to contact teachers in order to secure volunteer participants. In two cases, the principals of the selected schools made suggestions of teachers to contact. Those teachers were contacted in addition to ten others. Twelve participants were secured. Next, the researcher contacted all participants, and set up dates for interviews and observations. The researcher scheduled day long visits to the three selected middle schools in order to meet as many of the participants as possible. The consent form and the survey were sent to each participant in advance and were given to the researcher at the interview appointment. Data collection was comprised of four components. A survey, an interview, a sixty minute classroom observation, and document examination all lead to a volume of data. The interviews

primarily took place at the schools where the teachers were assigned, except for one who met the researcher at her office.

Participant summary. The participants involved in the study were all sixth and seventh grade teachers who primarily teach either science or social studies. They all teach at public schools in Virginia. All participants, due to researcher delimitation, had at least three years of teaching experience. Collectively they have 180 of teaching experience with the average number of years experience being 15. They each gained teacher certification through an accredited teacher preparation program and are considered highly qualified by the state of Virginia.

Individual participant descriptions. Kim is a sixth grade U.S. History II teacher. She has taught at the high school and middle school level. She has taught U.S. and World History as well as geography but is certified to teach history. She has been teaching for thirteen years. She also taught previously in an alternative setting. Kim has a bachelor's degree and is currently working on a master's degree in educational leadership. She stated that she never intended to be a teacher because she was too stubborn to follow in her mom's footsteps. However, she admitted that she loves her job and knows that her mom is proud of her.

John is a sixth grade U.S. History I teacher. He has taught for 15 years. He has taught special education and history. He has a master's degree in special education. John stated during the interview that he feels his special education background gives him an insight and special ability to work with the kids who are struggling with reading or otherwise learning the material.

Jack is a sixth grade U.S. History II teacher. He has four years experience and has not taught any other subjects. He has a bachelor's degree in history with a minor in education. He is also certified as a middle school English teacher and states that he enjoys teaching reading in his history classes.

Elizabeth is a seventh grade U.S. History II teacher. She has a master's degree in teaching. Her undergraduate degree was a major in American History. Elizabeth has 19 years experience and has taught at two other middle schools. She stated that she was an "old" person to have only 19 years of experience because she stayed home with her children until they started school.

Julie is a seventh grade science teacher. She has 26 years of experience teaching. She began her career as a medical assistant at a medical college after graduating with a degree in biology. She obtained her teaching certificate while working full time. She first taught biology at the high school level and then moved to science at the middle school level. She stated that she loves her job and is very happy at the middle school level.

Donna is a seventh grade civics and economics teacher. She has 25 years experience. She has a bachelor degree in special education. She began teaching special education in a self-contained classroom. She then returned to graduate school obtaining additional certification to allow her to teach elementary and middle school through grade seven. Donna also has certification in gifted education. She took time off from teaching when her children were young and did not receive a master's degree because her family moved before she could complete the program.

Sarah is a sixth grade science teacher. She has 14 years of experience teaching. She has a bachelor's degree in agricultural science and applied economics with a minor in agricultural education. Her certification for teaching is agricultural education and general science. Sarah enjoys her content area teaching and has been at the same school, in the same room, for all 14 years of her career.

Charlie is a sixth grade U.S. History I teacher. He has 10 years experience. He has a master's degree in teaching. He taught seven years at a high school in Hawaii before moving to Virginia. This is his second year in his current position.

Dolly is a sixth grade science teacher with 18 years of experience. She stated that she took some time off when her children were little and that she was really happy when the time came to return to work. She has a bachelor degree in science education. She stated that she has taken many graduate level courses in reading and in science but has not put them together in a program to earn a master's degree and probably won't at this point in her career.

Gretchen is a seventh grade science teacher with 10 years experience. She has a bachelor's degree in biology and chemistry. She worked in a lab after graduating from college and did not like the job. She then decided she wanted to teach, so she returned to college to earn a master's degree in teaching.

Mary is a seventh grade civics and economics teacher. She has been teaching for 18 years. Her teaching background includes teaching first grade, seventh grade math, pre-algebra, and civics and economics. Mary has a master's degree in teaching. Her

certification is in PreK through eighth grade. She was a history major in college with a minor in education.

Debi is a sixth grade U.S. History I teacher. She has been teaching for 10 years, all of which have been in her current position. She has a master's degree in teaching and is currently working towards the educational specialist degree in administration. Her undergraduate degree was biology.

Survey

Participants were given a survey to complete and return to the researcher at the time of the interview. The survey consisted of the following statements that were ranked by participants on a Likert Scale of one to four (one meaning that they strongly disagree with the statement, two meaning they disagree with the statement, three meaning that they agree with the statement, and four meaning that they strongly agree with the statement).

- I. Content area teachers do not have the time to teach reading.
- II. Content area teachers do not have the training to teach reading.
- III. Content area teachers do not have the responsibility to teach reading.
- IV. Teaching reading is important.
- V. Teaching reading in content areas is important.
- VI. I teach reading in my content area.
- VII. I do not have the ability to teach reading in my content area.
- VIII. I do not have the time to teach reading in my content area.
- IX. I do not have the training to teach reading in my content area.

- X. I do not feel that teaching reading is my responsibility.
- XI. My teacher preparation program fully prepared me to teach reading in the content area.
- XII. I am confident in my ability to teach reading in the content area.

Once completed the surveys were compiled and coded for further data analysis.

Table 3
Survey Results

Statement number/ rating (percentage)	1 strongly disagree	2 disagree	3 agree	4 strongly agree
I	1 (8%)	3 (25%)	8 (67%)	0 (0%)
II	0 (0%)	6 (50%)	6 (50%)	0 (0%)
III	4 (33%)	4 (33%)	4 (33%)	4 (33%)
IV	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (16%)	10(83%)
V	0 (0%)	2 (16%)	4 (33%)	6 (50%)
VI	1(8%)	5 (41%)	6 (50%)	0 (0%)
VII	0 (0%)	8 (67%)	2 (16%)	2 (16%)
VIII	0 (0%)	6 (50%)	4 (33%)	2 (16%)
IX	0 (0%)	5 (41%)	4 (33%)	3 (25%)
X	5 (41%)	4 (25%)	3 (25%)	0 (0%)
XI	4 (25%)	6 (50%)	2 (16%)	0 (0%)
XII	0 (0%)	4 (25%)	8 (67%)	0 (0%)

Survey summary. The survey gave an in-depth look at the participants' beliefs about and attitudes towards teaching reading in the content area. The majority of participants

do not believe they have time to teach reading; six participants believed they had adequate training to teach reading; six participants believed it was the content area teachers responsibility to teach reading; all participants believed that teaching reading is important; two participants believed that teaching reading in the content area is not important; six participants believe they teach reading in the content area; and ten participants feel that their teacher preparation program did not fully prepare them to teach reading in the content area. If teachers feel that they don't have time to teach reading, do not view it as their responsibility, and do not feel adequately prepared to do so, it would be expected that they would not teach reading (Flint, Maloch, & Leland, 2010). There was a data inconsistency between survey item nine and eleven. Item nine asked about the participants training to teach reading in the content area. Seven participants agreed that they do not have training to teach reading in the content area. However, when asked in item eleven about how their teacher preparation program prepared them to teach reading in the content area, ten disagreed that their program had fully prepared them to teach reading in the content area. Finally, with 10 participants believing they were not prepared to teach reading, eight have confidence in their ability to teach reading in the content area.

Interviews

The interviews were audio recorded with each three phase interview lasting from thirty minutes to ninety minutes. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim over a period of several weeks, producing sixty five pages of transcription. The interviews were not edited by the researcher, nor were responses altered in any way. Some interview answers were repetitive and some of the participants digressed from the topic, but these

items were included in the transcriptions as a way to allow the readers an insight to the participants and their emotions and feelings regarding the topics and questions. Once transcribed, the interviews were color coded to highlight themes. Once the themes had been established, the interviews were coded again to further derive commonalities and differences among participants.

Interview summary. The interviews indicated that participants have additional duties assigned to them such as team leader, enrichment, remediation coordinator, content leader, SIMS coordinator, and others. Kim stated:

Okay, I am the team leader, the child study coordinator, social studies department chair; I help with the after school program and supervise that. Um, I usually lead parent conferences and go to all of the IEP meetings for sixth graders, and whatever else the principal asks me to do. All in addition to teaching. (laugh).

Elizabeth stated, “There are different things I like to do. I am also the team leader here for the content areas and the (CLC) Content Learning Continuum. When referring to additional roles and responsibilities, Julie said, “I also cover ISS one day, um we have regular duties, bus duty, hall duty. I am team leader, effective school climate committee; I used to do homework hotline, taking kids to Chesapeake Bay each fall.”

Participants were willing to talk openly about their experiences as young learners, adolescent learners, and adult learners. Several participants referenced teachers and learning experiences that had helped to shape the way they teach now. Donna remembered:

We didn't have TV. We just read all the time. My parents were great readers. I remember two friends who had difficulty reading and I remember how excruciating it was for them to have to read out loud. When I decided to become a teacher, I tried to keep in my mind how my friends must have felt. I think oral reading is important, but try to be mindful of those who will have difficulty.

Sara remembered a bad experience and reported:

I remember in second and third grade we did math and reading. There was nothing extra. You did math; you did reading. I remember my second grade teacher would jump down our throats if we didn't stop at the period and pause at the comma. But we learned to read with expression.

Gretchen remembered one of her teachers who made learning fun, "she engaged us. I think it was easy the way she taught." She also mentioned a time when learning was not fun, "I had to do a lot of writing and repetition. I had to write and write and repeat and memorize just to get the material, but not always understanding it fully." Mary made mention of her eighth grade civics teacher:

Well, I remember my eighth grade civics teacher was also our senior government teacher when we got to 12th grade. We all liked her very much. She was very much into current events and relating them to what we learned. I remember taking notes on note cards, after reading a section of the textbook. Then we would trade the cards and ask each other questions. I remember she had us do a "current event" activity each week with newspaper articles. There were a couple of kids who never had theirs so I did them for them. I really liked that activity.

All participants were able to identify at least one instructional strategy that they use in their classroom that specifically helps the below level readers. Mary stated that she teaches the same material to all students but will vary the expectations. For example she stated that she provides notes to some, but requires others to complete the notes themselves. She also stated that if she provides the notes, the students still must participate in all activities. Kim stated that she does not differentiate much within her classes because of the content, but depending on the makeup of the classes she can differentiate instruction from class to class. When asked if he has specific strategies for the below level readers, John replied:

Not necessarily as a group, but on an individual basis I will pull folks aside and help them out. I show them how to use the book, the read signs. Generally when I do a reading guide, I give them a span of page numbers to focus on and whether they are in order or whether they have to search through sections. I present differently to different classes.

Jack stated:

In the classes with the lower level readers, well I really only have one that is specifically low. I have a special education teacher in the classroom with me which helps out tremendously. We try to work on decoding especially when we come across words that they have not seen before. We talk about prefixes and suffixes or roots to get them to see that bigger words are made of smaller words.

Elizabeth described how she groups students to help address problems that below level learners may experience, "I try to make sure that when we work in groups, that it is

heterogeneous, but also I will put the lower kids together and see who will take the leadership role. I use a paraphrasing strategy that helps all of my students.

Each of the schools selected as sites for the study have an on-site reading specialist who works specifically with students that are below grade level readers. The students have a resource period during the day set aside to allow them to receive specific reading skill instructions. The participants mentioned that the reading specialists ask them about the student's progress in their classes, offer advice and instructional help, but mostly work with the students in the resource room. Most of the participants described this as a good model for reading instruction and are appreciative of the reading specialist. Julie stated:

A lot of the kids have reading intervention one period a day. She gives them word sorts and works in small groups. She will use my content vocabulary to introduce new words to the kids, and she is good about helping with intervention. She knows how to teach reading. I don't (personal communication, May 9, 2011).

Classroom Observations

The classroom observations provided the researcher an exceptional opportunity to closely examine aspects of content area teaching. Further, data gathered during classroom observations lead to an opportunity to compare what the content teachers said they believe about teaching reading in the content area, and what they actually do during instruction. During the observations, the following behavior were observed and recorded:

1. Types of questions asked by the teacher and students

2. Types of displays in the classroom
3. Types of assignments students were completing
4. Instructional strategies used by the teacher
5. Differentiation of instruction for any students

These categories emerged as common activities and observances throughout the classroom visits. The researcher took notes on the composure of the classes, the class activities, the physical look of the classroom, interactions between teacher and students, specific teaching strategies used, level of student engagement, use of textbook, and reading activities during the observation. These observation experiences gave insight to a great deal of data. This data was recorded by the researcher and then coded in order to identify themes. During the coding process, common instructional strategies, classroom routines, the physical look of the classroom, the level of student engagement, the amount of teacher talk vs. student talk, and variances in work or expectations were all noted and sorted into specific categories to make the data more manageable. Those areas of secondary coding were specific activities observed, explanation of use of textbook ,(if used), description of reading activities, description of physical look of classroom, description of level of student engagement, description of specific instructional strategies, and an “other” category for additional notes and comments.

Document Examination

Documents from the lessons being observed were collected as a way to further construct and identify beliefs and instructional strategies. Document examination also offers an understanding of the participants’ purpose for instruction. The documents that were collected included lesson plans, worksheets, unit organizers, and some individual

assignments, depended on what the teachers were actually doing at the time of the observation. Documents were not collected over a period of time but during the classroom observation in order to make instructional connections between lesson plans and actual classroom work. The documents examined were actually used in concrete activities. These documents were coded and sorted by type of activity, level of questioning, and reading level, and then they were compared to see if a level of difficulty could be determined. Specifically, after the classroom observation, the documents were analyzed for types of questions by highlighting the questions with a different color depending on the level of the question according to Bloom's Taxonomy. Titles or headings were written at the top of the documents to identify the type of activity. For example, some of the documents were cloze activities so "cloze" was written at the top of the document. Matching, multiple choice, and short answer were other types of documents that were labeled. Notation was also made as to whether or not all students in the class received the same assignment. For example, in one class a different assignment was given to two students who were considered gifted, so that document was marked "for gifted students." Once the activity documents were labeled, they were sorted and counted as a type of instructional strategy. The lesson plans were examined to see if they included differentiation activities and to see if specific reading skill instruction was included in the plans as part of the daily plan.

Once data was collected, analyzed, and coded, commonalities among the participants began to emerge. These themes were able to provide insight and answers to the research questions as well as serve as a spring board for further research and additional questions.

Themes

In order to synthesize the data across the different modes of data collection, I had to regain focus on the research questions. Determining the attitudes and beliefs the participants had about content area reading instruction was mostly structured by the surveys and interviews; however, there was a convergence of information from classroom observations and document examination as well. Determining the instructional strategies used in the classroom came from analyzing the classroom observations and document examination. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe the attitudes, beliefs, and instructional strategies of content area teachers in regards to teaching below level students in their content area. Below are the discoveries about what the content teachers believe and what they practice.

Beliefs about content area reading. Contrary to what O'Brien and Stewart found in 1990, the participants all believe that teaching reading in the content area is important. Just as Cantrell and Callaway reported in 2008, the participants agreed that the infusion of literacy instruction across the curriculum is needed. The participants all either agreed or strongly agreed that reading in the content area is important; however, only half of the participants indicated on the survey that they teach reading in their content classes. During the classroom observations, no participants were observed teaching direct reading strategies during their content area lessons. While teacher preparation has been deemed crucial for content area teachers, ten participants felt that their teacher preparation program had not prepared them to teach reading in the content area, with two stating that they had never had a reading course in their teacher prep

program. Further, nine of the participants felt that it was not their responsibility to teach reading.

One of the concerns that shaped the beliefs of the content teachers and was constant throughout the interviews was the reality that students were coming to the middle school so far behind in reading. Kim stated:

I sometimes feel that the gaps in the students reading abilities are too big, and you are not really doing groups at either end of the spectrum justice. It is hard to meet the needs of second grade readers and high school readers in the same classroom. They struggle to work independently. I think in first, second, and third grade they should do away with anything they can and focus on teaching the kids to read. Even though they get the content through other ways, they still need to learn to read (personal communication, April 25, 2011).

Other participants shared the belief that students come to the middle school too far behind to catch them up in reading. Julie expressed:

In an ideal world I would like them to come to me being able to read. It is ridiculous that kids get to the seventh grade and can't read.when you are in the seventh grade reading on a third grade level, it is tough. We group our students heterogeneously, and it is hard to meet everyone's needs. I have asked that next year we do more cluster grouping so that everyone can get more of what they need. We just keep moving them on, and that increases my frustration as a teacher. I need to help them learn to read, but I am also responsible for my own

content material. That is a huge frustration and concern for me (personal communication, May 9, 2011).

Charlie emphasized that while his current class did not have many below level readers, it was difficult to find the time to teach reading when there are so many content area demands. “I think it is very difficult with the amount of content we have to teach to focus primarily on reading, but I do think it is possible to build those skills into the content that you teach (personal communication, April 19, 2011).”

Dolly expressed great appreciation for the support from her administration with below level readers and but questioned how the students got to her unable to read:

I do wonder though how they get to sixth grade and still can’t read above a third grade level. That is frustrating to me and the kids as well. They keep coming and the demands get harder, but they can’t rise to meet the demands. I am not trying to blame anyone, not at all, but it is hard to understand (personal communication, April 19, 2011).

Gretchen noted:

I would like to have a magic wand to wave and help them. Sometimes it is so frustration. ...sometimes I wonder how they got through elementary school and are in sixth, seventh, and eighth grade and are not able to write a sentence. Some of them are primer level readers. How does that happen (personal communication, April 8, 2011)?

Time for teaching reading in the content area also played a part in shaping the beliefs about the phenomenon for the participants. With the rigorous standards required by the curriculum and the pressure of end of year assessments, participants felt that there was not enough time to give to teaching actual reading skills. This frustration is supported by the research conducted by Flint, Maloch, and Leland in 2010 stating that rigorous standards, high stakes testing, and personal beliefs all play a part in the teachers' practices. The participants each taught five to six forty to fifty minute classes each day. All classes were heterogeneously grouped for the most part, but there was evidence that each teacher had one or two inclusion class for students with special needs. Dolly said:

Sometimes I feel like the seventh grade class gets slighted because I only teach one seventh grade group I spend the majority of my time and resources on the sixth graders, but still don't have time to teach reading to either group (personal communication, April 19, 2011).

Learning to read. Within the theme "learning to read," two smaller ideas seemed to emerge. There were differences in how the participants themselves learned to read and how they understand the process of learning to read. Most participants could not remember the process in which they learned to read but rather remembered particular activities and teachers. Kim remembered a lot of worksheets, sitting at the reading table with a teacher, and reading with some kids in a grade ahead of her. She also remembered that she knew most of her letters and a lot of words before she started school. John also referenced remembering a lot of worksheets when learning to read by saying, "I was good with vocabulary, but I wasn't a fast reader and probably am still not considered a fast reader. My rate was very slow (personal communication, April 26, 2011)."

His statements here focused on the issue of fluency and recognizing words with automaticity. John felt that because he wasn't "fast," he was not a real good reader; however, he believed that his comprehension was good. He also remembers doing grammar and writing skills later in elementary school and middle school.

Jack remembers reading in whole groups a lot of repetitious reading as an elementary student. He remembers being a good reader and enjoying reading. Elizabeth remembers the groupings from first grade and that she was an average reader. She mostly remembers going to the library with her mother:

I came home with the book *Little House in the Big Woods*. It seemed tremendously long. I remember getting into that book and realizing the book was due in a day or two. I had to read read read to get it finished. I didn't want that story to end I liked it so well. It seemed that the more I read, the easier it got (personal communication, April 19, 2011).

What the participants remember about learning to read touches on some of what the research describes as the structure for reading instruction. Phonemic awareness seemed to have been taught to the participants in varying ways or perhaps not at all. Most of the phonics instruction and vocabulary instruction seemed to take place through worksheets according to the interview information given by the participants. Fluency instruction was practiced through the repetitious readings mentioned by Jack. Instruction in comprehension seemed to be based on answering questions about what was read.

The participants' understanding about teaching reading was as varied as their experiences about learning to read themselves. Several of the participants indicated that

they did not know how to teach reading. Focusing on comprehension of the content material they are responsible for teaching is the main concern of the participants. The comprehension aspect of the reading instruction was identified to be most important to the participants and is the main objective for their content area reading material. Several of the participants identified this as the key purpose for reading. When asked what he considered the most important pieces of reading, John responded, “Comprehension definitely. That is where I focus. I give them coping skills, and teach them to understand (personal communication, April 26, 2011).” Jack mentioned specific reading strategies that he uses to help students develop comprehension and vocabulary skills:

I like to do think alouds, and I will give examples where I actually model thinking for them. I also demonstrate cause and effect relationships. I am big on organizing informationAll of this leads to the goal of comprehension and understanding the material (personal communication, April 25, 2011).

The participants agree that there is a process to learning to read, but none could elaborate on what the process entailed. Rather they offered comparisons of what they remember about learning to read, to what they experience with their own children or others’ children as they learn to read. For example, Kim remembered, “We didn’t do sight words. I know my niece works on sight words a lot (personal communication, April 25, 2011).” Debi stated that she did not consider herself a strong reader in middle school and she did not read much unless she had to. She further stated that she didn’t enjoy reading until she was in college. When asked specifically about what she remembered in regards to learning to read or how children learn to read, she responded, “I don’t

remember much except rote memorization of the words (personal communication, May 5, 2011).”

Julie felt strongly about the fact that she doesn't know how reading is taught:

It is ridiculous that kids get to the seventh grade and can't read. I have no idea what goes on in the elementary school so I would not be able to even suggest anything to help. I have had no reading courses..Only content courses because I was getting endorsed to teach secondary education (personal communication, May 9, 2011).

Learning content material. The goal of reading content area text is to be able to gain knowledge and understand the information. Students need to possess comprehension skills in order to do this. For the students who can't read the text themselves to gain the information, the participants offered alternatives to reading as ways of accessing the knowledge. The participants seemed to embrace their role in helping the students make connections and understand the text through alternative strategies. The classroom observations revealed that all participants used some form of interactive note taking. This allowed the student to access the material by following along and filling in notes as the material was taught in class. All participants used visual aids in their classrooms such as the projector, interactive smart board, games, drawings, etc. During the interview, participants were asked to recall how they had been taught content area material. Their answers included lectures, worksheets, reading the textbook and answering the end of chapter questions, field trips, memorizing vocabulary words, projects, hands on activities, and lecture based on stories. It was interesting that none of

the participants listed interactive note taking as a method used when they were learning; however, it is a method that all content teachers used in their classrooms.

Instructional strategies. The participants used a wide variety of instructional strategies to teach their content area classes as shown in Table 4. During observations, the participants seemed to understand the importance of background knowledge to the topic and therefore provided background to the lesson by reviewing previous lessons or having brief relevant discussions. The participants reached out to students with different learning styles by offering different modes of learning in the classroom. While some of the instruction was in lecture format, it was paired with interactive note taking, group work, or games so that the level of engagement was remarkable. Each participant clearly stated objectives for their lessons and opened the class with a review activity of some sort. Specific strategies that the participants identified as being used for students below grade level included pre-tests, differentiated worksheets, and purposeful grouping. Participants also indicated through the interviews that they work with students who are struggling in small groups or individually. John stated that teaching the students to manipulate the textbook was important and that they needed road signs to help them. Participants who teach history mentioned the use of timelines and flow charts as being important to students who struggle because they are visual representations. During her interview, Elizabeth stated that she uses paraphrasing to help students understand.

I work alone with my struggling readers and have the other teacher work with the larger group. When I do that I allow them to read and take the paragraphs apart at a slower pace so they understand what they are reading. I like to take them to a

quiet place to do this so that the others are not held back and the struggling students don't feel bad (personal communication, April 19, 2011).

Julie stated that they don't do a lot of reading from the textbook in her class because most of the students find it too difficult to understand. "I use a lot of visuals, pictures...I may make up questions and have them use the book to find the answers. I type most of my notes up in a language that is easy for them to read and understand (personal communication, May 9, 2011). Participants used scaffolding activities, or activities that build upon each other, during instruction as a way to build background knowledge and review. Compare and contrast was also a strategy used by the history teachers specific to particular events and people from particular time periods.

Other strategies that the participants mentioned they use with below level readers included graphic organizers, individual attention, help with notes, extended time, arranging tutors, or additional help from the reading specialist.

Table 4

Common Instructional Strategies Among Participants

Name of identified instructional strategies	Number of participants using the strategy (percentage)
Similarities and differences	8 (67%)
Summarizing	5 (42%)
Note taking	12 (100%)
Practice	4 (25%)
Non-linguistic representations	12 (100%)
Cooperative learning	8 (67%)
Setting objectives	2 (17%)

Providing feedback	5 (42%)
Generating and testing hypotheses	6 (50%)
Questioning	12 (100%)
Scaffolding	10 (83%)
Direct reading instruction	0 (0%)

Not all schools participating in the study have a middle school reading specialist. The teachers who mentioned the reading specialist stated that she focuses on specific reading skills, not always content material. They appreciate the fact that she is there to help the students learn to read and enjoy the opportunities to collaborate with her.

Specific question design was another strategy that was noted during observations and document examination. Participants used questions to get students involved in the discussion and to engage them in different levels of thinking. Students' answers to questions were valued and often challenged to increase the level of thinking and analysis.

Types of questions. During observations, it was noted and became a common thread throughout that key questions had been developed in advance of the lessons in order to give the instruction focus. The essential features and objectives of the lesson were identifiable by the questions that the teachers asked. Participants practiced effective questioning techniques according to Marzano (2001) by asking some higher level questions that required analysis, synthesis, and evaluation; however, most questions asked during the instruction were basic comprehension and knowledge level questions. Several participants also involved students in the questioning process by having them develop questions for their classmates at different levels such as factual, convergent, and

evaluative. Developing the different levels of questions was also coded as a differentiated activity during the analysis of the classroom observations.

During document examination, it was noted that the cloze procedure was used by all participants during interactive note taking activities. This is a procedure which assesses comprehension in a “fill in the blank” manner. The participants used it as a guide for note taking and as a way to assess the textbooks.

Challenges identified by participants. The participants identified challenges to teaching reading in their content area as well as challenges to teaching below grade level readers. Time was a common problem mentioned by most participants. Kim mentioned not having enough time during the course of her class period to focus on reading instruction with the below grade level kids because the content material is so rigorous. John stated that the lack of time prohibits him from breaking his large heterogeneous group into smaller instructional groups frequently enough to have a big impact. Charlie was concerned about the amount of time he must spend teaching the students the basic facts and the information they need to be able to recall. Eight participants agreed that they do not have the time to reach reading in their content area.

Teacher training and preparation was another challenge that the participants identified. All participants agreed that their undergraduate programs had not prepared them fully to teach reading in their content areas; however eight felt confident in their ability to do so if given adequate training.

Fifty percent of the participants felt they did not have the responsibility to teach reading in their content classes, supporting research by O’Brien and Steward (1990);

however, another 50 % of the participants agreed that they do teach reading in their content classes.

Discrepancies in Data

There were some discrepancies or inconsistencies identified in the data collected that should be noted. First, while all participants agreed that teaching reading is important, and 87% agreed that teaching reading in the content area is important, no evidence was collected through observations or document examination that indicated teaching reading was practiced in the classrooms. Second, there was a half and half split about the statement “content teachers do not have the training to teach reading,” but when asked on the survey if they felt they had the ability to teach reading in the content area, 67% did not feel they had the ability and 25% felt they did. This shows that fewer felt they had the ability than felt they had training to teach reading in the content area. Finally, several participants during interviews indicated that they differentiated work for students who struggled, and used higher level questioning for students as well. During document examination, only one participant had differentiated a lesson plan, and only one had modified the note taking format. This is not an indication that the participants don’t do what they said instructionally, only an indication that it was not observed.

Summary

The participants come from a variety of backgrounds and they have varying knowledge about teaching reading. Their differences include the number of years of experience, the content material they teach, their educational backgrounds, their experiences as learners, and their experiences as teachers. Their similarities include they

are content area reading teachers who believe teaching reading is important, they believe their teacher preparation programs did not prepare them to teach below grade level readers, and they believe that in their current positions they do not have the time to teach reading in the content area.

The participants rely on a variety of instructional strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students. Table 4 shows the different instructional strategies observed being used by participants and a percentage as to how many participants used each strategy. The researcher found that as opposed to directly teaching reading skills such as decoding and phonics, the participants taught comprehension skills that do not rely directly on reading or comprehending written text. They taught the content material by using strategies that manipulate the text and promote skills such as listening comprehension, combined with interactive note taking, group work, and visual learning opportunities. The content teachers used questioning strategies as a means to elicit responses about what was verbalized during the note taking sessions. Much of this information was at the basic knowledge and comprehension level which is in contrast to the types of questioning described by Marzano (2001).

The theoretical framework of the study was based the constructivists theory that learning comes from knowledge and experience (Caine & Caine, 1991). This theory is supported by the data in that the participants do what they know how to do and have experience with. Their level of self-efficacy as reading teachers is not at a level where they feel competent to teach reading in their content areas. This statement and finding is supported by the literature about Bandura's work in 1977 and 1993.

Some findings of the study did not agree with literature previously presented in this study. Barton (1997) found that once a child can read, many learning opportunities open up; however, the findings indicate that the content teachers in this particular study were more focused on teaching the content without direct reading instruction. They believed that literacy skills are not necessary in order to learn. The practices of the content teachers who did not teach explicit reading skills in their classroom differ from the findings of Hiebert and Taylor (1994) who found that once a student gets off to a slow start, they will remain behind unless they receive direct literacy instruction. Adams, Carnine, and Gersten (1982) found that direct instruction shows improvement in performance. The findings of this study indicate that participants did not practice direct instruction of reading in their classrooms. Finally, Jones (2006) found that in order for students to be successful in content area instruction, teachers should use literacy strategies associated with reading in all content curriculums.

The final chapter of this study discusses and summarizes the findings, examines the limitations of the study, and makes recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The focus of this final dissertation chapter is to examine and provide answers to the research questions that were developed in the beginning of the study. First, a summary of the study is provided and followed by conclusions that have been made from examination and analysis of the data. The following section discusses the limitations of this study. The final section of this chapter discusses and suggests recommendations for further research.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to study the attitudes and beliefs of content area teachers regarding below grade level readers. This study also was to examine the instructional strategies used by content area teachers for below level students and what challenges they face teaching these students. The researcher was also interested in how much preparation the participants received to teach reading in their content areas and how their own remembrances of learning impact the way they teach. The researcher sought to discover common attitudes and beliefs about content area reading as well as common methods of teaching students who are below grade level. The goals and desired outcomes of the study helped to shape the following research questions:

1. What are teachers' beliefs about teaching reading in the content area to students who are below grade level readers?
2. What are teachers' attitudes towards teaching reading in the content area to students who are below grade level readers?

3. What are the strategies teachers are using to teach below grade level students content material?
4. What challenges do content area teachers face when teaching content material to students who are below grade level?

In order to collect the data necessary to answer the research questions, each participant completed a twelve question survey that examined their beliefs and attitudes towards reading in the content area as well as their personal preparation to teach reading. The survey also examined the extent to which the participants teach reading in their content classes. Next, a three part interview was conducted with the twelve participants. The researcher also observed each participant instructing content area material for an hour. After each observation, the researcher collected documents used during the lesson to analyze as a source of data.

The method of research selected for this study was phenomenology. This particular method of research focuses on the life world and human experiences. Phenomenology looks at the perception of the participants of the phenomena being studied in order to gain meaning from the experiences. The voice and actions of the participants were particularly important in this study as they were the primary source of the data. Amadeo (1997) declared that the phenomenological method of inquiry has three elements: a) reduction, b) description, and c) search for essences (p.237). By using these methods, the researcher was able to attain a large volume of data, reduce it, describe it based on common characteristics, and search for commonalities and meaning within.

The literature review for this study looked at various topics regarding teaching reading, teaching content material, teacher beliefs about reading instruction, teacher

efficacy pertaining to reading instruction, characteristics of high quality instructors, preparing content teachers to teach reading, effective instructional strategies, and science and social studies instruction. Sources included scholarly articles and books written to explore each of the topics. There was an abundance of information on each topic and it had to be synthesized in order to determine what information best fit the study. The selected literature shared common themes. The first theme consistent throughout the literature was that high quality teachers do what is needed to teach their content area material. The second was that using the most effective teaching strategies in content based classes lead to teaching comprehension skills. Finally, the literature suggests that the training of content area teachers to teach reading has an impact on their beliefs, attitudes, and efficacy, as well as their classroom practice.

The participants for this study were purposefully chosen according to the content area that they teach. Some were recommended by their principals and others volunteered. The researcher did solicit volunteers from one of the schools with the permission of the principal. All participants either taught middle school social studies (history or civics), or science. The experience level of the participants varied from four to twenty-six years. All participants had a desire to help the below level readers in their classes succeed.

Data for this study was collected in four ways. First, each participant completed a survey of twelve questions that focused on their attitudes and beliefs about teaching reading in the content area. Second, the researcher completed a thirty to ninety minute three part interview with each participant. The length of the interview was dependent upon the amount of information the participant gave. The focus of the interview was to

gain limited personal background information, educational experiences, and student and class data. The interviews also focused on gathering information about the participants teaching experiences, beliefs about reading in the content area, and further information about instructional strategies the teachers use with below grade level learners. The interviews were somewhat structured in that each participant was asked the same core questions, but as the conversations developed, the interviews became unstructured and all information was accepted and recorded. Next, the researcher completed an hour long observation of each teacher during a content lesson. The observations focused on actual classroom practices, instructional strategies, and how reading was taught in the classroom. Finally, the researcher collected documents from the participants following the observations to examine, analyze and code for additional data.

Discussion

Beliefs and Attitudes

The participants in this study shared several common beliefs and attitudes towards teaching reading in the content area. Among these was the belief that students who are in middle school should be able to read. Many of the participants mentioned being frustrated with the responsibility of teaching students such rigorous content material that were still on an elementary or below reading level. Several participants mentioned that they did not understand how the students got to middle school with such low reading abilities. While the participants did not have the answer to the problem, they had the attitude that students should be taught to read in the elementary school above all else.

The participants also believe that content area teachers do not have the time or the training to teach reading. Each participant teaches a full schedule of courses of either five or six periods each day, with each period being forty-five to fifty-five minutes long. Their classes are heterogeneously grouped for the most part. Each participating school had schedules designed to accommodate special education students in inclusive settings with the regular education students. All three schools also scheduled additional support for the inclusive classes either from a special education teacher or an instructional aide. The participants agreed that this helped with management and differentiation for that class period; however, time is still limited and the focus of the content classes is the content material, not reading instruction.

A third common belief is that teaching reading is important. All participants believe that it is important to teach reading at the middle school level. Each of the schools selected as sites for the study have an on-site reading specialist who works specifically with students that are below grade level readers. The students have a resource period during the day set aside to allow them to receive specific reading skill instructions. The participants mentioned that the reading specialists ask them about the student's progress in their classes, offer advice and instructional help, but mostly work with the students in the resource room. Most of the participants described this as a good model for reading instruction and are appreciative of the reading specialist. Julie stated:

A lot of the kids have reading intervention one period a day. She gives them word sorts and works in small groups. She will use my content vocabulary to introduce new words to the kids, and she is good about helping with intervention. She knows how to teach reading. I don't (personal communication, May 9, 2011).

Mary spoke very complimentary of the reading specialist in her school by saying:

I was real worried about some of my students at the beginning of the year. I can teach them the civics through other avenues, but that doesn't help them learn to read. The reading specialist pulls them for their intervention block each day and works on their specific reading deficits. I have really seen the kids get better at reading this year and gain a lot of confidence (personal communication, May 2, 2011).

Finally, all participants believe that below level students can learn content material and master the curriculum. The participants were very encouraging to their students and provided them with multiples supports in the classroom in order to maximize their learning. The participants maintained the "do not give up" attitude and projected that attitude to their students; however, none of the participants taught specific reading skills during their content lessons. Rather, it seemed that they used various effective instructional strategies that allowed the students to access the content material through other modes.

Instructional Strategies. The participants shared several common instructional methods for teaching their content area material that are specifically mentioned in the literature review as most effective strategies. First, the participants all used some form of interactive note taking. Each participant had a different style of note taking and a different expectation of what the notebook would contain; however, each notebook was set up in an organized fashion that was easy to read. While Marzano's 2001 analysis of literature regards verbatim note taking as an ineffective method of instruction, he found

that note taking did increase student learning when it was interactive, when the teacher prepared notes ahead of time, and when the notes were used as a guide or in a “work in progress” fashion. The participants used note taking as an instructional tool that fully engaged the students and allowed them access to the material through different modalities such as fill in the blank, drawing, graphic organizers, unit organizers and group work.

Another common instructional strategy was review of previously learned material. During observations, the participants used review as a precursor to new information and embedded it throughout the lessons to add meaning and substance to the new material.

The participants used technology in their classrooms to further engage the students. The use of interactive white boards was paired with power point presentations, match games, modeling of note taking and fill in the blank activities, and individual presentations.

The participants used the textbooks minimally. They did not rely on the textbook as the source of all information and learning. Rather they synthesized the information from the textbook and other sources and combined it into interactive engaging lessons. The textbooks were used most frequently by the participants as references to complete other assignments. When students were required to read from the textbooks, the participants supported them by previewing the vocabulary in the section ahead of time. One commonality that concerned the observer was that the teachers seemed to focus solely on the content material during the classroom observations. There was no reading instruction.

Challenges. The participants were able to easily identify and speak freely about challenges they face as content area teachers responsible for teaching below level readers. All of the participants agreed that their teacher preparation programs had not fully prepared them to teach reading in the content area. Five of the participants stated that they had never taken a reading course and that the majority of their work towards teacher licensure had been in the content area they are teaching. Unsurprisingly, due to the lack of confidence in their ability to teach reading, most of the participants do not teach reading in their content area. Teacher efficacy is context specific and is related to what teachers do in their classrooms and is related to what they believe about their abilities (Yeo et al., 2008). Therefore the participants do not risk teaching reading ineffectively, instead, they make accommodations and find ways to teach the content material that does not involve the student learning directly from printed material. The students create their own textbooks in the form of the interactive note books.

The limited time that the participants feel they have to teach a demanding and challenging content curriculum limits the amount of time they feel they have to give to teaching individual reading skills. Participants in the study stated that depending on the group of kids they have each year, completing the curriculum completely and in-depth is often a challenge.

Finally, the participants viewed the varying levels of reading abilities in the classrooms that are mostly heterogeneously grouped as most challenging. Some classes contained students who read on the second grade level and students who have been identified gifted. While only three of the participants mentioned that tracking these students would be a benefit, all participants agreed that the mixed abilities present

problems in the content classes. Participants agree that there are benefits to the mixed grouping model in that it provides positive role models and learning models for the lower students; however, participants felt that they could not appropriately address the needs of both ends of the spectrum all the time in the mixed classes.

Recommendations

This study examined the phenomenon of teachers' attitudes and beliefs towards teaching reading in their content areas to below level learners, the instructional strategies they use to do so, and the challenges they face. These content area teachers face daily instructional challenges that either stem from their attitudes and beliefs about their roles and responsibilities, or are shaped by their perceptions of their roles and responsibilities. Based on the data gathered from the participants, surveys, observations, and document examination, the researcher has developed several recommendations for developers of teacher preparation programs, school districts, administrators, and teachers.

Teacher Preparation Programs. Teacher preparation programs should prepare content area teachers to teach reading as well as their content material. While "Teaching Reading in the Content Area," is a course required by many teacher preparation programs, it should not be the only experience students have with teaching reading. Providing a strong pedagogical foundation in reading instruction can be beneficial to the teachers and the students they come in contact with throughout their careers. While content area teachers tend to focus mostly on the reading sub-categories of comprehension and vocabulary, they are unaware of the building blocks that are needed to enable students to recognize words, read fluently, and make greater sense of text.

Therefore, it is the recommendation of this researcher that teacher preparation programs include courses in their licensure programs that focus on:

- Foundations of Reading (including an introduction to phonemic awareness and vocabulary instruction).
- Diagnosis of Reading Difficulties.
- Reading in the Content Area.
- Practicum and/or internship with a reading teacher.

Teachers with experience in reading instruction have a higher level of teacher efficacy and therefore are more willing and capable of teaching lower level students reading skills.

School Districts. School districts are responsible for providing professional development that is designed to increase student performance. The participants in this study clearly indicated that they do not feel adequately prepared to teach reading in their content area, nor do they feel they have the necessary skills to do so. Teachers enter the field from various universities, teacher preparation programs, and backgrounds. Therefore, the experiences in teaching reading they bring with them to districts is also varied and often non-standardized. This indicates that there is a need for expectations at the district levels. School districts should set a minimum expectation of reading course work expected of teachers and provide avenues to meet those expectations. After reviewing the data gathered from the participants, school districts should:

- Review recent research on reading instruction and adopt a set of beliefs pertaining to reading instruction for their district.

- Partner with a local university that meets the belief system of the district in order to provide professional development to teachers in the area of reading.
- Set a minimum expectation of reading experience for teachers, and use the professional development opportunities to help them meet the expectations.

Administration. School administration is responsible for setting schedules, grouping students and assigning teachers. Careful planning should go in to this process in order to make sure students are in the best situation to maximize their learning. Administrators should strive to create an environment where all teachers are working at a high level of efficacy. After analyzing the data gathered from interviews and observations, administrators should:

- Support the district's belief system and participate in professional development activities.
- Pair up the lower level readers with the teachers who have the highest level of efficacy in teaching reading.
- Accept input from the staff about grouping and scheduling decisions.
- Allow teachers time to plan together and share professional practices for the benefit of the students.
- Set expectations for student learning that are attainable and provide support for teachers and students to reach those expectations.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover and describe the phenomenon of content area teachers and their attitudes and beliefs about teaching below level readers, the instructional strategies used, and the challenges that they face. One of the delimitations was that the study was limited to twelve participants from three similar school divisions located near southwest Virginia. Another delimitation was that in order to focus on content area teachers the participants were drawn from only middle schools and were either social studies or science teachers. The small number of participants was also a delimitation, so the findings should not be generalized to all content teachers as a representation of that population. The one hour observation should also be considered a delimitation as longer observations or several observations may reveal more data.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study depended on surveys, interviews, observations and document examination by the researcher to gather data and find commonalities among attitudes, beliefs and practices. Several interesting issues surfaced during the interview and observation sessions that were outside of the scope of this study.

This study should serve as a springboard for further research in the area of content area reading and below level readers. This study was qualitative and relied on the voice of the participants, their surveys, and observation by the researcher. A larger quantitative study based on a survey similar to the one used in this study would provide information may from a larger data base and allow the application of generalizations regarding the attitudes, beliefs and practices of content area teachers. A state-wide survey research project would be beneficial to school divisions and universities and would provide information about common issues among districts. A larger study of this type would also

allow for more geographic diversity because of the larger numbers making the results clearly generalized to a larger group of content teachers.

Further research into the practices of teacher preparation programs in the area of reading instruction for content area teachers would give educators an insight into whether or not a discrepancy truly exists between the way elementary teachers are prepared to teach and the way content area teachers are prepared to teach.

This study focused on middle school teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and practices pertaining to content area reading and below level readers. It would be helpful to compare the results to a similar study of high school content area teachers in order to determine if the problem is consistent through the final stages of schooling before students enter college. It would be interesting to have the high school teachers' perspectives on the issues surrounding reading in the content area. Regardless of the future research selected on the topic, the data gathered certainly serves as a support and as evidence that future research in the field of reading in the content area is merited.

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Appendix A

Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

READING IN THE CONTENT AREA: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE BELIEFS, ATTITUDES, AND STRATEGIES CONTENT AREA TEACHERS USE TO TEACH BELOW GRADE LEVEL READERS

Lisa A. Clark

Liberty University

Department of Education

You are invited to be a part of a research study of beliefs, attitudes, and strategies content area teachers use to teach below grade level readers. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a social studies or science teacher at the middle school level and you agreed to participate in the study. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Lisa A. Clark, Liberty University

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to give an in-depth look into teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and practices for teaching below-level readers in the content areas. The data gained from a sample of the population who teach reading in the content areas of social studies and science will provide useful information for teacher education programs, mentor programs, and teachers who are currently in the field. The results of this study may also provide school administrators with insight into the practices and beliefs of their teachers enabling them to focus, at the school level, on professional development and improving practices.

The study seeks to answer the following:

1. What are teachers' beliefs about teaching reading in the content area to students who are below grade level readers?

2. What are teachers' attitudes towards teaching reading in the content area to students who are below grade level readers?
3. What are the strategies teachers are using to teach below grade level students content material?
4. What challenges do content area teachers face when teaching content material to students who are below grade level?

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

1. Participate in a three part interview
2. Participate in a simple Likert survey.
3. Agree to a one-hour classroom observation by the researcher.
4. Member checks (check accuracy) transcripts of interviews and observations.
5. Provide copies of lesson plans or other documents for lessons observed.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The risks of the study are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life.

The benefits include time for professional self-examination and reflection.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only researchers will have access to the records.

All records of interviews, surveys, and observations will be kept in a locked box at the home of the researcher. The data collected will only be used for the purposes of the research project and will not be shared. All data collected will be kept securely for three years to be used for any follow up research. At the end of three years, all recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the Liberty University, with the researcher, or your current employer. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Lisa A. Clark. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact Lisa at home (261-5751) or cell (570-5353).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, Dr. Fernando Garzon, Chair, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1582, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at fgarzon@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understand the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study. The interviews will be audio recorded for accuracy. By signing below, you agree to have the interview recorded.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B

Pilot Study Survey

Name: _____

Grade & Subject Taught: _____

Please complete the following by placing a number (1-4) at the end of each statement -- one meaning that you strongly disagree with the statement, two meaning you disagree with the statement, three meaning that you agree with the statement, and four meaning that you strongly agree with the statement.

- I. Content area teachers do not have the time to teach reading.
- II. Content area teachers do not have the training to teach reading.
- III. Content area teachers do not have the responsibility to teach reading.
- IV. Teaching reading is important.
- V. Teaching reading in content areas is important.
- VI. I teach reading in my content area.
- VII. I do not have the ability to teach reading in my content area.
- VIII. I do not have the time to teach reading in my content area.
- IX. I do not have the training to teach reading in my content area.
- X. I do not feel that teaching reading is my responsibility.
- XI. My teacher preparation program fully prepared me to teach reading in the content area.
- XII. I am confident in my ability to teach reading in the content area.

Appendix C

Pilot Study Interview (guiding questions)

Part I

How long have you been a teacher?

What is your highest degree?

What was your major in college?

What subject do you teach?

How do you remember learning the material in the content area that you teach?

Were you a good reader as a middle school student?

What do you remember about learning to read?

Part II

Describe your roles and responsibilities as a content teacher.

Describe the classes/students you teach.

Describe what your day looks like (including schedules, duties, expectations, etc.)

Do you have below level readers in your classes?

What strategies do you use to teach the below level students the content material?

What support do you get in working with below level students?

Part III

What information would you like to add about teaching reading in the content area, below grade level readers, specific challenges you face?

Appendix D

Main Study Interview (guiding questions)

Part I

How long have you been a teacher?

What is your highest degree?

What was your major in college?

What subject do you teach?

How do you remember learning the material in the content area that you teach?

Were you a good reader as a middle school student?

What do you remember about learning to read?

Part II

Describe your roles and responsibilities as a content teacher.

Describe the classes/students you teach.

Describe what your day looks like (including schedules, duties, expectations, etc.)

Do you have below level readers in your classes?

What strategies do you use to teach the below level students the content material?

What support do you get in working with below level students?

Part III

What information would you like to add about teaching reading in the content area, below grade level readers, specific challenges you face?

Appendix E

Main Study Survey

Name: _____

Grade & Subject Taught: _____

Please complete the following by placing a number (1-4) at the end of each statement one meaning that you strongly disagree with the statement, two meaning you disagree with the statement, three meaning that you agree with the statement, and four meaning that you strongly agree with the statement.

- I. Content area teachers do not have the time to teach reading.
- II. Content area teachers do not have the training to teach reading.
- III. Content area teachers do not have the responsibility to teach reading.
- IV. Teaching reading is important.
- V. Teaching reading in content areas is important.
- VI. I teach reading in my content area.
- VII. I do not have the ability to teach reading in my content area.
- VIII. I do not have the time to teach reading in my content area.
- IX. I do not have the training to teach reading in my content area.

- X. I do not feel that teaching reading is my responsibility.
- XI. My teacher preparation program fully prepared me to teach reading in the content area.
- XII. I am confident in my ability to teach reading in the content area.

Appendix F

Main Study Interviews

Interview with Kim, sixth grade social studies.

Thanks, Kim, for agreeing to help me with this study. The first part of the interview will gather some background data, and the rest will focus on your experiences as a teacher. Ok?

Sounds good.

The first question is how long have you been a teacher?

I think this is year thirteen, no thirteen and a half. I started at half of the year when I began.

Have all of your years been in this subject area?

I am only certified to teach history. But I have taught geography. U.S. II, World History. I have taught at both the high school and middle school. I also taught in an alternative setting. That was challenging, but I really learned a lot about individual students and how to meet a variety of needs.

What is your highest degree?

I have a bachelor's degree, and I am working on a master's degree, which will be in Educational Leadership. I didn't want to be a teacher because that would mean following in my mom's footsteps. I was just that stubborn, but here I am and I love it. I

think she is proud, but she never says I told you so. I think she is afraid I'd quit. (laugh).
I have a lot of family who are educators, so I guess it is natural that I am as well.

Where did you go to undergrad?

I started at Dabney, then went to MBC. I am working on the master's at JMU.

Ok, so the focus of the next several questions will be on content area reading and below grade level readers. Some of the questions will relate to teachers and their learning experiences. So tell me what you can remember about learning in content area classes.

Well, I don't remember a lot. There were a lot of worksheets. I had a great history teacher who differentiated way back then, but it wasn't very exciting. We had a literature class and a separate English class. I don't remember kids being grouped, except in first grade we had some reading groups. In elementary schools you didn't even have science and social studies every day. When you did, it was a lot of reading textbooks and doing worksheets. At the high school, in advanced biology, there were more hands on activities.

What can you tell me about what you remember about learning to read?

Well, um, we didn't do sight words. I know my niece works on sight words a lot. I remember sitting at a table with the teacher and reading to her from our different leveled books. I must have been a good reader cause I got to go to the second grade class some. My mom was a teacher and she read with me a lot. I knew most all of my letters and

sounds before I started school, but can't remember exactly how I learned. My mom mostly taught math and social studies.

Describe your roles and duties as a teacher here at this school.

Ok. I am the team leader, the child study coordinator, social studies department head; I help with the after school program and supervise that. Um, I usually lead parent conferences and go to IEP meetings for sixth graders, and whatever else Phillip asks me to do. All in addition to teaching. (laugh)

Can you describe your classes to me?

I have all ability levels from gifted to sped. Before we got the additional teacher, I had 25 or more in each class. Now, I have fewer students. When we split the larger groups, I kept the middle to lower kids and gave the new teacher the higher and the gifted kids. I have three inclusion classes. Again, even in those, there is a wide variety of differences. There are probably four in the classes who don't need to be there except they need special conditions for assessment. Then, in one, it is an all read aloud class.

Ok, so in each class you have special education students, above level kids, on level kids, and some who just need additional support?

Yes, yes.

Tell me about the inclusion support you receive.

Well in two of them I have a special education teacher to help and an aide. There are also some ESL kids in that class. Um, so I have someone with me three of the five periods a day.

Wow. Ok so describe to me how your class looks instructionally.

Well, the unique thing is my material is new. They have not had it before so there is not much to review. They have not had the 1865 to present class yet. I am the first to teach it to them, so even my gifted kids most would not pass a pre-test. Even the ones labeled gifted still need instruction. I can move a little faster with them and do some different things, but they still need to be taught. In my other classes, I don't get to differentiate much because of the content. I do one outside project on the Civil War. We also do a specific project on SOLs and essential knowledge. There is not a lot of differentiation within each class, but due to the makeup of the classes, I can differentiate what I do from class to class. Does that make sense?

Yes.

I do a lot of partner work. When we do think pair share, I will put some of the good readers with those who have difficulty, and they work well together.

What kind of administrative support do you get with your below grade level readers?

Principal is wonderful. In the past several years the special education has been strong. Other than read alouds, they have not needed much. This group is struggling with some things. They have big gaps. We have been talking at lunch some about the benefits versus the cons of heterogeneously grouping these kids. We feel that sometimes the gaps are too big, and you are not really doing groups at either end of the spectrum justice. It is hard to meet the second grade needs and the high school needs in the same class. Principal is great. He listened to me and my concerns about the class size. He

convinced the central office to hire an additional person to help the sixth grade team out because of their diverse needs. That has helped us a lot. It was almost impossible to meet their needs. If I go to him and need something and he can help me, he does. I have only 11 in my sixth period and that is optimal. They are the lowest kids I have and I have an instructional aide. It is still very hard because two are second grade readers. One is very bright, however, they struggle to work independently. I can't use many of the traditional methods like lecture, or reading with them. I have to continually change activities to keep them engaged. I give them typed notes; we go to the library and have group discussions. The ideal situation would be, well, I think our system is flawed when they get to sixth grade on this low of a reading level. If they could just read, it would be so much easier for them and for me. Even though they get the content through other ways, they still need to learn to read. We have great intervention programs, but it is hard to teach them to read in the sixth grade. They have so many gaps. We can't fill in all of the gaps. I think in the first, second, and third grade they should look at objectives and do away with retention and just focus on teaching them to read. They just keep getting further behind. I have one student who gets very frustrated and upset because he can't read and he wants to learn. He will only do his work with me. He gets very frustrated. I don't know how to fix it within my room, much less at the other levels. I know I do lots of auditory and oral exercises and use hands on as much as possible. I hope they are making the connections. When I do our notes, we use boxing and numbering techniques. It's the interactive note taking. We don't use the textbook. I have never had formal training in teaching reading.

So in your teacher education program you didn't have reading classes?

No, I think because I was a middle or high school teacher, they didn't require it. I didn't have any reading courses. I have no background at all. I use Mrs. Reading Teacher to help me when I am really in need of ideas. I also think that we should have reading classes in the middle school separate from the English classes. I think that would help. I also try to make sure I am near the students who need me regularly. They will attempt the work and attempt to read now, but it has taken them a while to get to that point.

Is there anything else you'd like to share?

No, just that I am doing what I can and am very open to learning new things.

Ok, well thanks a lot for your time today.

Interview with John, sixth grade middle school U.S. History teacher:

Hi John, thank you for helping me with the study. How long have you been a teacher?

Fifteen years almost sixteen.

Have all of your years teaching been with the same school system?

No, nine years in another county, and seven years here.

What is your highest degree earned?

I got a master's degree in Special Education.

What was your major in undergraduate school?

At the college I went to it was social studies education 5-12, with a lot of focus on content, then the last year and a half it was content with a lot of education classes loaded into it.

What subject area do you currently teach?

United States History 1865 to the present so

What do you remember from being a student yourself about learning the content?

I don't think I started putting it all together until I started, um, picturing it as um, a big story. I guess as an elementary student you are more worried about all the mechanics of things and you don't focus on the big picture as much, and I guess somewhere around seventh or eighth grade I started figuring out you needed to put everything together in

any subject into a big story and figure out how it related to the world outside of the building. So, when I started realizing that it was all part of a bigger picture, it started making more sense, and I got off of the mechanics and got off of making sure I had every word just so, and it's kinda neat because I see both ends of that transition here in sixth grade. There are some that are still giving exact word for word answers and some that are ready to tell you how it relates to what is happening in Egypt today. So, it runs the whole gamut.

Think back to when you were a middle school student, were you a good reader?

What do you remember about reading?

I was good with comprehension and I was good with vocabulary, but I wasn't a fast reader and probably am still not considered a fast reader. I am much quicker now, but still not a fast reader. My rate was very slow.

What do you remember about learning to read?

A lot of worksheets, a lot of fill in the blank. I don't really remember too much about it until seventh or eighth grade. When I grew up reading was taught by a reading specialist in every grade up through eighth. Ninth grade was the first for me without a strict focus on reading. Then they did grammar and writing skills in another class. In the seventh and eighth grade I had a young teacher who was just four or five years out of college and really just threw out the old traditional basal reader with all of the ancillaries and brought in albums and talk about poetry and how it blended in with what we were learning. Then after listening to the lyrics, she would write it on the board and show you how it was poetry and you'd learn different kinds of poetry. We learned a lot from just

listening to the music and she also really stressed word attack and variations, because by the time you are in seventh or eighth grade you should have a decent grasp of reading so she took it from there and went ...these are the exceptions to the rules, these are kinda how they make sense um, so she kinda put it in the big picture context again and pushed people to think beyond what was right there. I don't really remember looking at a basal reader in class. I mean we read novels; we would read articles. That was twenty five years ago, so that was way different than anything I had experienced up till then. Up till then it had been basal reader, worksheet, and so on.

What was that experience like, how did it impact you?

It is part of what made me think...gosh what should I do..I think I will teach. I am having a great time with it. That experience helped to make me realize that there is a purpose for all of the ancillaries and worksheets, but there is also a practical application for that knowledge. To be fair to the folks beforehand, the drills gave me good background knowledge to be able to be successful in her class. At the time it was just so different than anything we had had before. In classes here I have done things differently than some have seen, and I get a few phone calls asking what exactly I am looking for or wanting them to do. You know, I started late in high school to piece together my education trying to look beyond a little. I really focused on what I had to do in college. I did two practicums where I had to visit classrooms and observed and did some duties, but didn't teach yet. I started trying to look at it from the other side and realized that there are many different styles of teaching. I think having that experience that is why I am sitting here now with many of my own students trying to be patient and give them time to mature and learn, because I don't think I really did until somewhere between seventh and

eighth grade. As a person, your skill matures; sometimes they will struggle and then move forward with big strides, and a lot of it depends on who is teaching them and how well they work together. It's not that the teachers they have had before didn't do their job; they just haven't learned yet.

Thinking about your roles and responsibilities as a content area teacher, how would you describe those roles and responsibilities?

Well, first of all I have to meet the state standards and, um, I try to approach class as the standards are the minimum, so they are going to learn that and then some. I try to ask questions that get kids to think beyond. I am sad to say that it is a struggle, and it probably is for any content teacher right now to get kids to think outside the box because there is so much and I have been to several seminars, and heard about the results we want to see, and heard that multiple choice questions can lead to higher level thinking, and okay maybe they can, but, the creativity part is disappearing. When kids are asked to be creative for the first time, it is like you have thrown them in the pool for the first time to see if they can swim. They figure it out and can take off with it, but initially they have to figure it out and get used to the idea that they can do and learn differently. But first and foremost the state minimums. I think if you can teach a kid to think, they are going to meet those minimums. So the second thing I try to teach them to do is to think, and then third I try to teach them to utilize the information in the text by using key words, road signs, highlighting, major topics, subtopics. The new books we are using the main vocabulary words are highlighted. I teach them how to navigate their book, the glossary, index and how to evaluate websites. Some are legitimate; some are not credible. Um, we work with that a little bit and the librarian helps out with that as well. So, that helps out a

great deal. I can tell the kids which sites are credible and usable. They also will understand citing their sources. My main role is to provide a foundation for them to think about their history and how it applies to their life and how it will help them continue to absorb and apply history so when they are our age they can hopefully make sound decisions.

How many history classes do you teach?

Four a day.

Can you describe the makeup of those classes?

Two are pretty heterogeneously grouped, and one is pretty high in comparison, heterogeneously, but higher ability so that the higher kids pull the more middle kids along and challenge them. They help motivate each other. I have one class that is a mix of special education and bubble students. In that class we have to focus a great deal more on breaking the information down into smaller chunks. I can't just say okay read four pages tonight and be prepared to discuss it. Seventy five or 85 percent won't be able to do it. We do a lot more reading out loud and discussing in class. Now the kids will volunteer to read and for the most part kids are patient with each other when they hit a point where there is a bump. Not always the case, but any class when you get them interested and they realize they can figure it out they will work. As the year goes on, I see more putting in the effort, and the families try to help as best they can. But one of my classes definitely leads towards the high end, one to the low, and the other two are pretty heterogeneously grouped.

So do you have extra support in any of your classes?

Yes I do. I have an instructional aide who is in the process of getting a teaching degree and has a good grasp on theory and ideas and organization and so forth. That adds a lot to. If I overlook something, I told her my ego is not big, so if you see something I am missing please tell me. She feels comfortable doing that. Also, I have a student teacher at this point, so I also have additional help there.

So in your sixth grade classes, about how many students do you think are below grade level in reading?

Well, our new text is much more readable than our previous one was, which is great and some that could not read the other are reading this one. They especially like the highlighting of key vocabulary in this book. This one is more on the sixth grade reading level and is much more readable and conveys all the needed information so I think there are a lot more kids who will be successful. I'd say there are 65 percent or better that can be successful, and I think with some encouragement I can get that up to 85, but there are about 15 percent who are going to struggle due to reading ability.

Thinking about that fifteen percent, do you have specific strategies or things that you do differently for them in class?

Not necessarily as a group, but on an individual basis I will pull folks aside and help them out. I show them how to use the book, the road signs. Generally when I do a reading guide, I give them a span of page numbers to focus on and whether they are in order or whether they have to search through sections. I try to give them many road signs to help them find the information. I do present to different classes differently. If I see the blank stare, I can readjust. My fourth period will usually go much quicker. They like to

discuss debate and move on. I do try to give everybody a good road map to follow and show them how to use the text. One of the biggest issues I find is fear of initiative. They don't seem to express initiative. I don't know if that is from past failure or what, but if I hand out a worksheet that is not multiple choice, they get all bent out of shape. I have to do a bit of cheerleading to get them going. As far as taking individual aside, honestly, I have up to twenty six in one room and it is hard to get to them all individually.

What do you see as some of the barriers to helping the lower level readers?

Number of personnel per student. The ratios are too big to give intense help. Generally we try to address them through our smart block. I will do guided readings in smart block together with the kids and go over it a lot. We go through a model of finding key information and looking at key words. It is hard to have the time to cover the content and work on content reading, so you have to hit the highlights and teach them how to look for key words and key information. You also have to teach them to make inferences. There are a lot of history terms that actually identify themselves by their name. The Rough Riders, for instance, in the Spanish American War...they were rough, just a group thrown together to fight the war. A lot of the terms reference what the explanation actually is. You know, it's, well, I try to do as much as I can, but time is a restraint. Management is also an issue. If you get too loose, some will get completely off task and distract others, while if you keep it too tight, some are then limited in what they can create or learn. It is a delicate balancing act. Time and ability to break down in small groups are the biggest restraints when there is one teacher to 26 kids. You can arrange group work, but you will always have some off task even within the group.

If time and class size were not issues how would you rate your ability to work with the lower level students? One being not so good, three being great.

I would be right in the middle. I am not a reading expert; I have not had that training. I have some strategies that I can use and that I have adopted from other places and some I just came up with, but I am not capable of identifying specific levels. I can tell they are struggling but can't identify the exact deficit. My special education background keeps my radar up for certain struggles, but pinpointing levels, no. Now, I don't have a problem coming up with ways to access the texts and teach comprehension. Word attack no, fluency, no.

What are the most important pieces of reading to you as a content teacher?

Comprehension definitely. That is where I focus. I give them coping skills, and teach them to understand. A lot of it is just practice, and you have to make effort. I use lots of strategies, jingles, acronyms, etc. I share with them some I came up with, even the goofy ones, and they can remember it. Then they put it together as the story, and they have learned some history. I come up with things that help them memorize information, but I definitely focus on comprehension. I will ask them if it makes sense, and if not, have them read it out loud and then share with someone else. Then to add it to the story of what they have already learned. I also use timelines and flowcharts. I can also identify the people who need more help, but I know when it is time to call in additional help when I can't help.

Interview with Jack, a sixth grade U.S. History and Reading teacher and a seventh grade civics teacher.

How long have you been a teacher?

This is currently my fourth year.

What is your highest earned degree?

Bachelors Degree from Longwood University majoring in liberal studies and a minor in history.

Where did you take your classes for teacher certification?

Uh, when I graduated, I didn't have my teacher license, so I had a provisional certificate and finished up while teaching in another county. I am currently certified PreK-8 and high school social studies.

So, think back and tell me how you remember as a student learning content material?

To be honest, I remember struggling, especially with the subject I like the most, which is history. I remember my parents working with me at home. Truthfully, honestly, I don't remember the techniques used for decoding, or breaking down words, but the biggest influence I remember about my learning would have been my parents help.

Do you have any particular memories about learning social studies and science material?

Uh, history was easy, because I was interested in it. It was a lot of memorization. Science was a little harder for me because it didn't interest me as much and required more application. Um, also the science words or vocabulary were often difficult to understand and pronounce, and that threw me off, and I didn't like that.

Would you have considered yourself a "good" reader?

I was decent. I wasn't the best, but I was on grade level or a little advanced.

Think back just a little further to elementary school and tell me what you remember about learning to read.

Alright, I remember a lot of whole group instruction um, I do remember, single instruction or one on one with some kids who were struggling. There wasn't a lot of differentiated instruction, but a lot of repetition. That is mainly what I remember.

Describe your roles and responsibilities as a content area teacher here at your school.

In terms of a reading teacher?

Well, let's talk about the history and civics instruction first.

Ok, it is kind of unique. Something I am passionate about is history and government. I don't want them to just memorize so my goal is to get them to understand what is happening and why. So what I try to get them to do is not focus so much on facts but the reasons behind the events. I take a little more time to help them appreciate where we have been, so when we move forward as a country we can see trends and learn what may happen because of previous events.

Describe the classes that you teach.

Ok. In terms of the makeup of the classes, I have about an even gender split, very limited minority population; I have no Hispanic students this year. I have about six African American students. Very good and sweet kids who have a willingness to want to learn. For the most part they are very interested and taking their time, and I see them making an investment in their education which is a very unique quality for kids at this age.

Do you have kids in your classes who are considered below grade level readers?

Yes.

What strategies do you use with those students?

In the classes with the lower level readers, well I really only have one that is specifically low. Most others are on grade level. I have a special education teacher in the classroom with me which helps out tremendously. Together we try to make sure we meet as many learning styles as we can, whether it be visual, auditory, or somebody who has to have it hammered home. We try to work on decoding especially when we come across words that they have not seen before. We talk about the prefixes, or suffixes, or roots to get them to see that bigger words are made of smaller parts that they can figure out. I would say the below level readers are confined to that one group. There are some in other groups that are grade level readers and are understanding the basic concepts, but still get hung up on new vocabulary. They have to think harder at those times.

What support do you get when you are working with below grade level readers?

I have a teacher in the room with me, and we co teach the class during second period. She is very helpful. Because there is in one class there are like five kids who need additional support, and it would be very difficult if I were by myself. She makes sure they get all of their accommodations and we learn how their accommodations can apply to kids who maybe aren't IEP or 504 kids. We try to apply what works to everyone. Also, the ability to have resources even from the ESL teacher. Last year the ESL teacher helped me out tremendously with the Spanish speaking kids. I absolutely have to teach the lower class differently. History is very content driven; there is a lot of memorization. There are a lot of cause and effect relationships and all of that can get mind boggling for the kids. So I simplify the material and use lots of visual supports and help them gain a better understanding of the general concepts.

What would you say your goal for the lower level readers in your class is?

I like to do think alouds, and I will give examples where I actually model thinking for them. I demonstrate cause and effect relationships. I, personally, am big on organization information. We do a lot of classifying and grouping so that the reading makes sense. All of this leads to the goal of comprehension and understanding the material.

Can you think of a teacher or another who inspired you?

My American History class as an 11th grader, I had my two favorite teachers. I loved the way they taught; I try to model some after them because they were so good at explaining and did a lot of different activities. They tried, and so do I, to take things that have happened in the past and put them in the present to make connections and analogies.

Also, they used, and I use, current events, or things that are happening now, to help explain what has happened in the past. Also, my math teacher did a great job. He spent a lot of time with me and invested a lot of time, and that made a difference for me because me and math are like oil and water. I will be honest with you, I am trying to think back, it's been a long time. Um, I'll tell you...my Spanish teacher. I had colleges looking at me for baseball and slacked off on academics because I thought I would have a scholarship. Then I hurt my arm. My Spanish teacher kicked my butt. She literally knew how to kick me into gear so that I could get to college and continue my education. I am very thankful to her.

Teaching, personally, I currently have a practicum teacher and we talk quite a bit. A lot of what I learned in college to be a teacher, I don't agree with. I think you have to have a great knowledge of your content area in order to be effective. You also have to have a passion for wanting kids to learn to grow and build them up. Reading in the content area is essential. Every teacher should have skills to help students learn the content material. The best way I can explain it is like with sports versus games. You can practice, but you have to be able to do it in the game, all across the curriculum. Organizing information applies in all areas – not just history. I am a big believer in teaching reading skills in the content area.

Interview with Elizabeth, a seventh grade United States History II teacher.

Thank you Elizabeth, for meeting with me, my first question is how long have you been a teacher?

I am in my 19th year. I started back after my children started school. It took me a little while, so I am an old person to only have 19 years (laugh).

Have all of your years been here in this school system?

No, I started in ** School system and worked there for 10 years before coming here in 2002.

Was your first assignment the content you are currently teaching?

Yes, here at this school, which was a new school the year I started.

What was your major in college?

My major was American history.

Where did you go to college?

I received my degree from Hollins College and my Master's from Hollins University.

So, think back and tell me how you remember as a student learning content material?

I was a big reader. I really learned a lot by reading historical fiction. Also, my father was a history buff, and we would go places on vacation to Civil War places. I

remember one, I had one, my seventh grade teacher, vividly – I picked up a lot of history from him. He was the kind of teacher you really wanted to do well for. My high school history teachers were basically football coaches, and essentially, it was read the book and answer the questions. I was pretty bored, and I was frustrated because I knew it could have been better.

What was it about your seventh grade teacher that inspired you?

He knew how to have a rapport with us. We could joke, but when he was serious, he really didn't have to yell at us or anything. The class just got serious, and um, within that whole type of student teacher relationship, we did pick up a lot of history and that particular year it was Virginia history. And another reason I might have liked it so well was because I knew it so well already. But, um, we just all wanted to do well for Mr. ** at that time; he was one of the few male teachers, and he his tests and things were hard, so it was an honor if you did well. I remember the Civil War test, and I only missed two on that and he was really proud and made me feel proud with what he did. Honestly, that is the best that I can remember; it was a long time ago.

*That is fine. Do you remember how his class was set up? I know you mentioned that the high school class was reading and answering questions. What was different about the set up of Mr. ** class?*

Right. We did debates. We were apart from the school in a little hut built behind the school. We debated things like the Civil War, whether the south had the right to secede. We did some projects, and yet there were definitely notes and paper pencil work.

It was a long time ago, but he did it in a way that he enhanced it. I would say the discussions we had made it more meaningful.

Were you a good reader at the middle school grades?

Yes.

Did you have a middle school? I know I didn't. We went straight from seventh grade to the high school.

It was a junior high school.

And you enjoyed reading?

Oh yes, all my life.

Do you remember how you learned to read?

Um, we didn't have kindergarten, but in first grade we had the red birds, blue birds, and yellow birds. I don't remember which I was, but it wasn't the "top" group. I think I was average, but what I remember the most was going to the library, my mother taking us to the library, and I think in second grade I came home with the book by Laura I. Wilder, *Little House in the Big Woods*. It seemed like a tremendously long book. I remember getting into that book and realizing the book was due in a day or two. I had to read, read, read, to get it finished. I didn't want that story to end I liked it so well. It seemed that the more I read it the easier it got. It was at that point that my reading took off. I was interested in it and wanted to read it. I think that is important.

Okay, now I want to talk a little about your roles and responsibilities as a content area teacher. Can you describe those for me?

Um, okay. Well, I have to of course teach the SOLs, but I believe in going way beyond the SOLs and I like to take my time. And we basically come into a new thing, for instance we are doing the Cold War now. Students need time to absorb that and I could have them sit there and memorize things, but they need to learn it, and it wouldn't show up well on the SOL tests if they just memorized it. So, um, I like to take my time and work with different aspects of it. We are gradually leaving the Cold War, and today we are starting the Korean War. So they're going to be working together in groups to come up with the footsteps leading through the Korean War. That way they will have had notes, worked on a map of Korea. They also have this routine today. Tomorrow we will look at some artifacts based on the K war, and discuss it more. We will come up with the "so what" statement. Today they are coming up with the footsteps. Once they are finished, they have to come up with a so what and a good extension that will help us to learn more. We may get to the so what today, and that is requiring them to think about this material and why it is important to today. To make a connection, sometimes they might just want to summarize the information, but I really push them to make connections, like how it impacts the US today and what we can learn from it. Of course, a lot of them are very interested in what is going on in the Middle East now and they are seeing some connections between the discussions we have had, especially between the Cold War and the fear of appeasement, which was a big thing in WWII. I think it is my responsibility to go way beyond the textbook and the SOLs, and that is what I work towards to give them an understanding. And the SOLs ...the way they are worded...if

the students don't have the background as to why there was a war or why they began they won't be able to make connections to why the U.S. ended up in those wars. So I like to let them take the facts after they have learned them and they have had time to get a little bit and do activities like skits. For instance we had a skit about a radio newsreel about a New Deal program. There are different things like that I do. I am also the team leader here for the content areas (CLC) Content Learning Continuum. I believe strongly in any help I can give them to become better content readers, not just for my content but for content across the board and in their future. We do something called word linking and word mapping, and they have usually have a page that goes with the unit. We also have a unit organizer, and we put in key information and the overall questions. If they can answer the over questions, which take a long answer, they are then pointed back to the Virginia SOLs. Because if they know the details to answer the questions, they should be able to fulfill answers on SOL tests depending on their reading. I have some very weak readers, I think every class does. Some of these readers, if they are motivated, they really benefit from the activities. I have others, if they aren't motivated, there are always three or four, I can't reach, and that bothers me so much. I can see their eyes looking at the page, but I know they are not following along at all and aren't engaged.

How many class periods a day do you teach?

I teach five because I have my normal planning, and I have one that is devoted to CLC responsibilities (Content Literacy Continuum)

Are all of your classes pretty much heterogeneously grouped?

Yes, all of my classes are.

Do you have any additional support in any of the classes?

I do. I have a special education teacher for about 20 minutes in fifth and seventh period.

So, what specific strategies do you use with your below grade level readers?

I try to make sure that most times when we do groups, that it is heterogeneous, but also I will put the lower kids together and see who will take the leadership role. I use a paraphrasing strategy that helps with all of my students. If I do this in class, I work alone with my struggling readers and have the SPED teacher work with the larger group. When I do that, I allow them to read and take the paragraphs apart at a slower pace so they understand what they are reading. I like to take them to a quiet place to do this so that the others aren't held back, and these don't feel bad. It also doesn't give them the option of not doing it. Of course I also modify test questions, use larger print.

You mentioned that you have a collaborative class, do you have a planning time with the collaborative teacher?

No, it is pretty much on the fly...or as best we can.

Is there anything else you'd like to add about reading in the content areas or below level readers?

I will probably think of things later. I cannot underscore the importance of reading in the content area enough. I try to do anything I can to help. Our goal is for them to be able to read and understand the SOL questions and be able to answer them,

not just the history test, but all tests, and all reading material. That's all I can think of now.

Ok, thank you again.

Interview with Julie, a seventh grade science teacher.

Thank you so much for agreeing to meet with me today. I know how valuable your time is.

The first question is how long have you been a teacher?

Twenty six years.

Have all of your years been with the same system?

Yes, and same subject area. Science.

What is your highest degree?

Bachelor's

And what was your college major?

Biology.

Where did you attend college?

Bridgewater.

At the time did they have a teacher ed prep program or did you go later and get certification?

I didn't originally begin in education. I graduated with a degree in biology. I later obtained my teaching certificate through VCU, while I was working at the Medical college of Virginia. When I finished, I had completed all but my student teaching and was kind of called on the spur of the moment the day before school started, and asked if

I'd teach biology here at ** High School. They were desperate so I started and taught two years with a provisional certificate.

When you were a student, what do you remember about learning content area material?

I was biology major. I had real high level courses. I learned mostly through lecture, reading, study, lots of lab work.

Think back to middle school...

There was no middle school (laugh)

Yeah, I didn't have a middle school either (laugh), but think back to seventh grade and tell me what you remember about your courses.

Pretty much lecture and worksheets. Some labs. Mostly teacher directed, worksheets, not much depth.

What do you remember about reading in middle school?

There was not a separate class. Just in our English class.

What do you remember about learning to read?

My mother taught me to read before I started school. Mostly word recognition. Um, my grandmother was a first grade teacher and gave me lots of things to use before I started school....mostly sight words. Then we got phonetics later, but mostly memorization at the beginning.

Ok, describe your roles and responsibilities as a content teacher.

I have all seventh grade science. That's all I teach.

Can you tell me about other duties you may have?

I cover ISS one day, um we have regular duties, bus duty, hall duty, I am team leader, effective school climate committee, used to do homework hotline, taking kids to Chesapeake Bay each fall. We do a lot of science, raising trout with the VDOGIF. We are releasing them next week.

How many classes do you teach each day?

Five.

Can you describe the individual classes?

Two are inclusion with an aide. Those are rather large classes. I have another class of low to average students. They are also above level students. I have one fairly large group with a cluster of accelerated students, but still have a "spread" in every class.

The kids that you referred to as low, what area of their academics do they struggle with?

Most everything, especially reading. Usually reading and math. A lot of science and civics are taught verbally, which makes it a little easier. In science we do a lot of hands on activities. Reading is really weak.

Think about those kids who are lower in reading. What specific strategies do you use with those students?

To be quite honest, we don't do a lot of reading. Our textbook is way too difficult for most of those kids. I use a lot of visuals, pictures. I may make up questions where they can go into the book and find answers word for word. I type most of my notes up in a language that is easy for them to read and understand.

What kind of support do you get from the paraprofessional who helps in the classroom?

One of the aides has been here a long time. She can help me co-teach. I design everything, but she can run with it and add to it. There are some students with accommodations and she makes sure they get those accommodations. In the other class, it is mostly handing out papers and no instruction support.

Do you have a reading specialist here at your school?

Yes

Describe how she works with you.

A lot of the kids have reading intervention one period a day. She gives them word sorts and works in a small group. She will use my content vocabulary to introduce the kids to new words. She is good about helping with intervention.

In an ideal world, what would you like to see happen with the kids who are below grade level?

In an ideal world, I'd like them to come to me being able to read. It is ridiculous that kids get to the seventh grade and can't read. Whether you retain or not, I don't know if it is a good thing. But when you are in the seventh grade reading on a third grade level,

it is tough. We have heterogeneous groups and it is hard to meet everyone's needs. We have a good set up with the reading intervention, but I think it needs to be addressed earlier. They need to make up some of those gaps before they get this far along. Ideally, we also need to focus on our gifted kids more as well. I took a course in gifted education and found some really good stuff, but with the real low kids in the class it is hard to use. I have asked that next year we do more cluster grouping so that everyone can get more of what they need. The administration was receptive. I have no idea what goes on in the elementary school, so I would not be able to even suggest anything to help. I have had no reading courses, only content courses because I was getting endorsed secondary.

Is there anything else you'd like to add about reading or your content area?

I love my content area; it is the best. I think in one of the forms I filled out I indicated that I don't do a good job teaching reading. I haven't had much instruction myself. I focus on the science aspect. I do talk about the Latin roots, interactive notes, and circle main ideas and words. We give synonyms. I guess if that is teaching reading I do a little of it.

Well, thanks Julie, it was a pleasure spending time with you and in your classroom today.

Interview with Donna, a seventh grade civics and economics teacher.

Thank you Donna for agreeing to meet with me and be a part of this study.

You are welcome.

How long have you been a teacher?

Twenty-five years.

Have they all been with this system?

No

Tell me a little about your teaching history.

Um, my first year I taught special education in a self-contained classroom at an elementary school. I had all disabilities in a wide age range in one room, not the greatest situation. Um, the next three years, I taught in an open school as a self-contained teacher in an open school. That was very interesting. A lot of that school's philosophy was teaching through learning centers. So our days were arranged around that and the philosophy that the schools use. After that, we moved, and I taught and went to grad school. I taught a self-contained sped class. I have 18 students within a 10-year age span. It was the first year that IEPs were implemented. We had to do home visits to do IEPs. Once we finished school, my husband and I, my certification was in learning disabilities. I had to student teach again at the campus school. Then we moved. I then taught a self contained LD class. Then I had a son and took five years off from teaching. I did substitute some at an elementary school. They asked me in September if I would take a third grade position. I did and loved it. That year, the county closed two schools

and I got “laid off.” The next year, I had a split position as a resource LD teacher at the middle school and the high school. When I was at the middle school, we moved into the teaming concept and began inclusion before it even had a name. My certification is also in PK-8. I wanted to get back in a regular classroom. I was very fortunate to be on the sixth grade team. I taught language arts. We blocked, but didn’t call it that. I taught language arts and social studies. When the middle school closed, I came here and started out of the sixth grade team. I taught world history and language arts. Then I was moved again to the seventh grade team and have been here since.

Wow. That is a lot of experience. I am sure it serves you well.

Laugh....well it does now. With all of the expectations within a classroom, I am also certified in gifted. The county offered that certification to us awhile back, so I am very diverse.

What is your highest degree?

When I was in the grad program, I had taken ..well we left there and moved, but I had three classes left to complete my masters, but my time expired before I could finish. I had become a stay at home mom and had not thought about it. So I would have had to start over. I did recently take three 600 level classes through another university recently. It was an absolutely wonderful experience.

What do you remember about how you learned content material?

Um, I don’t remember phonics, I remember being taught with the sight approach. I remember in fourth grade (since you’re asking about reading)....let me go back. My

parents were great readers. We didn't have TV. We just read all the time. I lived in the library. There were four girls, and reading was our free time entertainment choice. In fourth grade, I remember two friends who had difficulty reading, and I remember how excruciating it was for them to have to read out loud. When I decided to become a teacher, I try to keep in my mind how my friends must have felt. I think oral reading is important, but try to be mindful of those who will have difficulty. I remember one year there was a young lady who would get mad at me. You know, we read some every class period. It might just be a sentence, but we read...homework, notes....I can pick and choose easier stuff for some to read. The young lady would get mad because she wanted to read it all, and I didn't always let her because she struggled. I remember my fifth grade teacher had us read a lot of books and do book reports, I remember being assigned a lot of reading to do at home on our own. We had a lot of independent work. I don't....we really....I can't remember reading groups. It was whole group.

Ok. Thanks, how do you remember learning science?

Science is not my strong point; nothing really stands out. It seems that it was taught the same way the other subjects were taught. We didn't do as many hands on as they do now. I think it is good that they do it now. What I remember was high school and my nightmare was chemistry. Not to be mean or disrespectful, the teacher was capable and knew the material but had a hard time getting it across to us. She would get very frustrated with us if we didn't get it right away. College biology was real hard and I struggled with it as well. It was more like just do it...I have explained it and you should know it. I hated balancing the equations. Those were two things that stand out. Now, I see so much hands on activities. In this building, it is incredible all that the teachers do.

Describe your roles and responsibilities as a content teacher.

Well, the first thing that enters my mind is that civics has a SOL test, and it is hard. A lot of the content is on the 11th grade reading level, and the vocabulary is difficult. One of my challenges is figuring out how to teach the content and how to do it in ways that ..because the subject I teach on its own is not the most interesting...but trying to tie in vocabulary aside from just writing definitions...this class really requires thinking outside of the box. I am constantly looking for new material. I never teach the class the same way two years in a row, always looking for new materials and new ideas. Technology has become a big part. Since it is civics, the world is my textbook; today you'll see them doing a study guide. The textbook we adopted is mainly used as a reference tool, and they use their interactive notebooks and binders and pretty much everything they need to use in this class notes and all is in the notebook. Each notebook is divided into sections, so they have it all in one place. My challenge number one is vocabulary; we really see that with our Hispanic students. The pronunciation is very difficult. I try to make it all personally applicable to them. They also struggle with reading to find information. The multiple choice format has made it difficult. We do a lot of writing in here. We watch a public TV show each Monday that has a public opinion questions. We respond and I e-mail the answers in. We have had six students whose responses have been aired. That is a real motivator for them to do a good job. We also do a cross curricular activity with the language arts teacher. She took the vocabulary on the courts system and had them work it into their poetry unit. So, let's see, what else? Thinking (pause) just getting them to think (pause) we use discussion a lot, group work, figuring out the abstract.

So how many periods a day do you teach?

Five and it is all civics and economics.

How are your classes grouped, describe the makeup of them.

Ok. First, first, second and eighth period are heterogeneously grouped. Seventh period is a little different. It has the sped students and a sped teacher. There is a large number in that class, but not all special education students. My sixth period class is homogeneously grouped. That is the one you will see today, mostly top students. I like to do the Daughters of the American Revolution essay each year. It is a competition, and I think it is important that they do that so we do it here with the class. There are 20 of them doing a research paper. The librarian and I team teach it. All work is done here; homework is to keep up with civics. So I have to have students who are responsible, good writers, and motivated, who can keep up, so I ask each year to cluster a really high group.

Tell me about the students who you consider below grade level readers and the strategies you use to help them.

I do accommodated assignments. I used to do that for all the quizzes and tests, but I reexamined it and found that they have a read aloud accommodation, but still have four choices, so felt that I was not doing them justice by taking away choices. We give those students .. any students who need it....I will give them accommodated work to help them. I give them extended time, read aloud, we also do a lot of accommodating students who are not identified special education. I will take them to my desk or a table and have them read aloud to me. If I need to restate something or give them help I will. I have

them highlight and box on their quizzes and tests; I also have them eliminate wrong answers. They underline the question and the main words in the questions. Kids are seeing that these are really helping. They are buying into it. We also have a wonderful resource in our student management room. We have a lady who works there who is a retired teacher with a master's degree. We can send students to her for help on tests, assignments and uh, just extended time, a chance if they bomb something to tear it up and start over. I really push them to ask me questions when they aren't sure. I try to do that a lot.

Do you get ample support with the kids who are below level?

Definitely from the principal. He will actually do read alouds with the kids and help them anyway he can. I coordinate an afterschool tutoring program in reading and math. Our reading specialist is great. I communicate with the grade level teachers about the tutoring program as well, all three grade levels. The librarian is fabulous also. She will be a listener or help them.

In a perfect world, I wonder how we get students in the seventh grade who are three and four years behind. All students are assessed in language arts at all grade levels. What is frustrating to me is the students are frustrated as well. That turns into behavior problems. How do they get here this far behind? We just keep moving them on. My frustration as a teacher is I need to help them, but I am also responsible for my own content material. That is a huge frustration, a huge concern for me. We just keep pushing them through. I understand social promotion the concept. We have reading labs, after school tutoring; I feel like they need more if they are that far behind.

Thanks! I appreciate you taking your time to meet with me

Interview with Sarah a sixth grade science teacher.

Thank you so much for your help with this research project.

The first question is how long have you been a teacher?

Fourteen years.

Have all of your years been with this system?

Yes, at this school, teaching this subject.

What is your highest degree?

I have a B.S. in agricultural science and applied economics with a minor in agricultural education with an endorsement in middle school science. I should have been a banker. I got my agriculture education certification and license there. I was on provisional for a while and had to take eight courses to get the middle school science endorsement. I took those through the local community college in conjunction with another university. I would pick up a tape at the professor's house, complete all the assignments, take it all back and start the next assignment. I did a couple of classes at ** also.

Think about when you were a student, and tell me what you can about how you learned content material.

Sitting at our desks, with a textbook, reading, and then doing the chapter review at the end. Not much hands on till senior year of high school, then when I got to college.

In middle school, were you a good reader?

Yes,

Did you enjoy reading?

No

Did you have to do a lot of reading in your classes?

Uh uh.

Tell me what you remember about learning to read.

I remember in second and third grade that is what we did. We did math and reading. There was nothing extra. You did math; you did reading. I remember my second grade teacher would jump down our throats if we didn't stop at the period and pause at the comma. But we learned to read with expression. Reading is what we did. There was nothing special. We just did it.

Describe your roles and responsibilities here as a middle school content teacher.

Preparing them for the eighth grade SOLs. Since I don't have as much SOL stress, since there is not a sixth grade SOL science test, that's a hard question. Just making sure they know the material. It is much more than SOLs...it is being someone the kids can be around and not necessarily feel comfortable with but someone who gets them at this age.

Let's come back to that one.

How many classes do you teach a day?

Five, all sixth grade science.

Describe the differences in those classes.

First period...highly intelligent, only twelve, very respectful, want to participate, raise their hands, great group.

Second period....very intelligent, much more talkative than first period.

Third perioda comment every time you pause to breathe. You have to stay on top of them.

Fifth period...after lunch a little wound up. Some like to be up and down; that's fine as long as they pay attention and get done what they need to. The others don't pay much attention to the ones who need to get up, good personalities.

Sixth period...large class, talkative, but they are the class with either really high or really low kids. But they work well together. I like having the mix because I feel that the low kids have something to strive for. They are around someone who is doing what they should be ...good role models.

In your classes can you identify the kids who are below grade level readers and are there specific strategies you use to help those kids?

Well, you know we do a lot of hands on and use a lot of visual aides. We have created our interactive notebook where they can always go back and look things up. It is just different in here than maybe other places. They feel comfortable and we support them. I guess specifically, we do a lot of key word activities to teach vocabulary. They

don't copy definitions. I type them for them and they highlight and study, they can use their interactive books as a reference during tests and quizzes.

Not really.

Do you have any inclusive classes?

Most are in sixth period, but they are monitor only. The special education aide helps some in that class as well. She contributes well. She helps and is very dependable. She makes sure the kids are on task, helps get them caught up, reads to them, that kind of stuff. She works well, we work well together.

Ideally what would you want for the kids who are below grade level?

For them not to struggle. For them to experience success. That's why I do so much hands on. They can remember it, feel it, you know.

Is there anything else you would like to add about the below level readers or teaching reading in the content area?

Years ago there was a lady who helped us with a class for using strategies like chunking, highlighting, reading important parts, and just help with reading. That was really a big help. I try to use the strategies she taught us. I do a lot of that just because it helps.

Ok, well thanks and I did enjoy being in your class today.

Interview with Charlie a sixth grade U.S. History teacher.

Thank you for agreeing to help me and meet with me today. I really appreciate it.

How long have you been a teacher?

Ten years.

Have all 10 years been here in this county?

No, this is actually just my second year here. I taught one year in a high school and seven years in Hawaii.

What is your highest degree?

I have a Master's in teaching.

What was your college major?

My undergraduate was a double major in history and social studies education then my master's is in teaching.

Think back to when you were a student and tell me what you remember about learning history.

Um, in high school, a lot depended on the teacher. Some were straight out of the book....read, answer questions, turn them in the next day, etc. Others were more activity based, field trips, so all over the place. I have done the best in history, not science or math, so I learned well in all situations. Math and science was another story. I did enjoy the hands on experiences and field trips.

Think back to middle school, were you a good reader?

I was probably average to just below average, not a real strong reader. I did alright. I didn't read for pleasure until college. I worked nights at a toll booth and ended up reading and falling in love with it. I was like wow I have been missing out on this stuff.

That's great. Do you remember anything about how you learned to read?

No, I just, well I just learned how.

Describe your roles and responsibilities as a content area teacher.

Primarily I am responsible for US History I, sixth grade, and primarily, I make sure the kids are engaged in the content and learning the content, pass for the year and pass their SOLs.

Can you describe your classes you teach during the day?

Well I have about 130 students, divided into six periods a day. They are pretty much heterogeneous grouped for the most part. I do have one collaborative class with a higher percentage of special education students. I have a collaborative teacher who comes in for a period of time each day. Because there is a higher percentage of low students the extra hand is good.

In the other classes, do you have below grade level students?

Um yes.

What types of strategies or activities do you use with those students?

I do a lot of modeling, interactive notebooks, notes, pictures, activities, so they can express their understanding of the content. We do lots of games. I try to mix it up a bit. I use songs, lyrics. The interactive notebook helps students a lot....especially helpful with vocabulary. I try to keep my displays current and relative.

Do you get any additional support with the below grade level students?

Yeah, as a team we meet once a month with the guidance department and they are very helpful in talking with the students and parents. With most of our students there is a good support system at home. I know that is not the case everywhere, but we are very fortunate with our student population. There is some training that is offered to teachers. I was able to do an eight session class on how to get students engaged in the content.

What were some of those strategies?

Dramatic readings, technology, um, um, games. One of the things I liked the best that I had not used before was a story about Wilbur McClain who was a cool guy during the Civil War. The teacher projected the story, but as we read through it, he had inserted a bunch of hyper links to pictures of things about the story. That gives kids visuals of what they are learning. I really liked that. It pulls the kids in.

Is there anything else you'd like to share about reading in the content area or your specific strategies?

I think it is very difficult with the amount of content we have to teach to focus primarily on reading, but I do think it is possible to build those skills into the content that you teach. I think that is what most teachers attempt to do. There is just so much stuff

the kids need to be able to recall. I feel like I have to spend too much time teaching them to recall as opposed to teaching them to think. But there are opportunities where you can give them skills to practice reading and comprehension.

Thank you so much for your help. I will see you at 12 for the observation.

Interview with Dolly, a sixth grade science teacher.

Thank you for agreeing to help me with this research project. I really appreciate your help and your time.

You are welcome! I don't know if I will be much help.

Well, my first question is how long have you been a teacher?

I have taught for 18 years. I took some time off when my kids were little.

Have all of your years been here at this school?

No. I started in the county and worked at a middle school there, then came here when it was opened.

What was your major in college?

Science. I was a education major with science endorsement. I have a bachelor degree. I have taken courses beyond that but have never put them together in a program.

Tell me a little about how you remember learning the content area that you currently teach.

Well, let's see. I remember textbooks and reading, vocabulary. Um, it seems we were all doing the same thing in the classroom. I don't really remember a lot of projects. There, of course, were some teachers who gave us projects and hands on activities, but at that time not many.

Were you a good reader in sixth grade?

Yes. I loved to read. My mom was a teacher, and she taught me to read early on. We used to read together a lot.

Do you remember how you learned to read?

Lots of practice. We read a lot in school and the teacher ..well.. I don't remember specifically how she taught us, but I learned. It must have been sight words and spelling lists.

Describe your roles and responsibilities as a content area teacher.

Well, that is a lot. Are you familiar with CLCs?

Yes, a little.

Well, we use them here. All grade levels do. We have a member of each team who is responsible for keeping them updated and making sure we are using them. CLC stands for Content Literacy Continuum. Each grade and subject area has unit organizers and specific SOL organizers. Within each organizer, there are specific activities, but they are not dictated, more like a menu to select from. Anyway, I organize these. I also have the responsibility of teaching the sixth grade students all of the science objectives, but beyond that. The state objectives are minimal. I think the students need to be able to apply the information they learn. Um, I try, well I try to make sure they learn it by not just covering it and moving on, but by creating activities that help the students connect or engage. They like to draw and create things in the sixth grade, so I try to plan a lot of activities like that. See the walls and window?

Yes. The displays are great.

I did all of that. Well, the kids did. I have a lot of high expectations for them. If they don't do it right, they do it over.

What types of activities are displayed?

Fodables, stories, because it is important to write in all content areas, not just writing or reading class, time lines, flow charts. See, that one is the water cycle. I don't know if I have even answered the question.

Well, you have, but I will repeat it so you can go on if you'd like. Describe your roles and responsibilities as a content area teacher.

Oh, I also think it is my responsibility to make sure the kids who need help get it. For example, if they need something read to them, it is in my best interest to do it because that will help eliminate frustration on both our parts later on. I have other duties: SIMS, CLCs, bus duty, hall duty, and am team leader this year. It is very busy around here.

Ok, thanks. Describe the classes you teach.

Well, I have five sixth grade classes and one seventh grade science class. I hate to say it, but I feel like the seventh grade class gets slighted sometimes because I spend the majority of my planning thinking about and developing sixth grade stuff. I have more of them. I also spend most of my money on the sixth grade units. Sometimes I feel like the seventh grade class gets slighted because I only teach one seventh grade group. I spend the majority of my time and resources on the sixth graders, but still don't have time to teach reading to either group. But, because of scheduling, I have two preps. So I am

making the best of it. The seventh graders are learning. I just wish I could do more for them as well, like I do for the sixth grade students.

What do your individual classes look like, the makeup of them?

They are pretty much the same size, a good mix of boys and girls. We have a low minority population here. I have one collaboration class. In that group, there are some special education students. During that class I have help from the special education teacher. He comes in and works with not just those kids. He helps with all of them and that makes a difference because we do so many hands on activities. I think the kids learn more that way, especially the ones who are not good readers.

Do you have below grade level readers in your classes?

Yes, in all of them.

What strategies do you use to teach those students?

Well, um, I think, well, they respond well to the way I teach. They like the hands on activities. Also, I try to pair them up with other students so they can have good role models. They get extra help with notes, extra help with tests and quizzes, and the other kids don't mind. They seem to understand. I also use interactive notebooks, and the kids love them, and they are so good to help with organization. Some kids have so much trouble staying organized. We do word sorts and lots of other activities to reinforce vocabulary. But hands on is the best way for them to learn. They need to see it and feel it and know what it means. Does that make sense? Now, I grade their notebooks. My seventh graders and sixth graders know that if they keep that notebook up that is a 100%

as a test grade. I also always have one non-test assignment each six weeks period. This helps the special ed kids because they can do it at home, or get the information from somewhere other than the textbook. It is graded, but not a test. We also have a discipline policy called “star bucks.” We ask them to follow our 10 standards of behavior. If they do not, they will lose a “star buck.” At the end of the six weeks, we will have an activity day where if you have one star buck left you can attend the activity. They start with five. They can’t earn it back. They can’t trade or borrow. If they have none left, they have silent lunch on the stage. It is not academically based, but behavior based. They can play kickball, or sometimes we do BINGO. Seventh grade doesn’t do this and eighth grade thinks it is babyish. This is John Rosemond’s idea. He is wonderful. He said if you don’t inconvenience the child, you won’t change behavior. Have you heard of him?

Yes, we are almost finished. What support do you get in working with below level readers?

Wow. I get lots of support. I get assistance from the special education teachers, from the guidance department, from the librarian, from the principals. Mostly from my team as well. We are fortunate here to not have a real large low population. I love my job. I love the kids. I always try to do everything I can to help them. I do wonder, though, how they get to sixth grade and still can’t read above a third grade level. That is frustrating to me and to the kids as well. They keep coming through and the demands get harder, but they can’t rise to meet the demands. I am not trying to blame anyone, not at all, but it is hard to understand.

Well, that’s all I have. Thanks again.

Interview with Gretchen, a seventh grade science teacher.

Hi Gretchen, thanks for working on this with me. I really appreciate your time.

No problem, happy to help a colleague.

Ok, the first question is how long have you been a teacher?

Ten years.

And, what is your highest degree?

Bachelor's degree in biology and chemistry and teacher certification.

Where did you go to college?

Radford University for biology and chemistry and then I worked in a lab and didn't like it so I went back through MBC adult degree program to get teacher licensure.

Great, ok, think back to when you were a seventh grade. How do you remember learning the content material?

I had to do a lot of writing and repetition. I had good science teachers both in middle school and high school. One of my high school teachers made it fun. She engaged us. I think it was easy because of the way she taught. There were other classes that weren't so easy, and I had to write and write and repeat and memorize just to get the material, but not always understanding it fully. In my class I do a lot of writing. The students do a lot of highlighting and underlining. I try to do a lot of hands on stuff. It is hard with class size.

Ok, thinking back to middle school again, were you a good reader?

Yes, I love to read.

What do you remember about learning to read?

I don't remember anyone sitting down and saying this is how you have to read, but my grandmother was an elementary school teacher. She helped. I remember when I was little being read to a lot. She read to me all the time. My favorite was *A Christmas Carol*. I don't remember learning it; I just did it.

Tell me about the class size you mentioned a moment ago.

Um, well, it is science, and we try to do labs and hands on things, and I have 20 or more in each class. They don't all fit at the tables. It is hard to be with the students at the same time so that they can get the full experience. Class management can be difficult with larger classes. With smaller classes, I can divide them better and have smaller groups there in a group as opposed to seven. It makes a difference. Lack of materials and lack of space play a role as well.

Ok, as a content teacher, describe your roles and responsibilities.

Um, The big one is discipline, teaching my subject area and the SOLs, making sure I cover and review because they won't take an SOL test for a year on this material. Getting them to be responsible and respectful, sometimes like you are another mom. My expectations are similar to those who have an SOL test, but my stress isn't as bad. We work together to get ready for the test. For example, before SOLs I will take the eighth graders and review the seventh grade material with them. The eighth grade teacher

covers my class. Then the kids will go to the sixth grade for a few days for review and the eighth grade teacher will cover her class. That way, the kids are reviewing in the room with the teacher who taught them. Hopefully, just being in our rooms seeing our posters and our learning materials will help trigger their memories of what they learned. We also ask that they keep their interactive notebooks and use them to review. They keep them and take them back to her. We really don't use textbooks a lot. They use binders and notebooks to create their own books. They keep them year to year.

Describe the makeup of your classes.

We don't really group kids, but we do have one strong group in seventh grade. But most others are heterogeneous. There are low, high, middle in most all classes. My biggest class is the class where we use an inclusive model with the special education kids. I have another teacher, a special education teacher. But mostly they help in ways that isn't instruction. She likes to sit with the ones who have bad handwriting..whatever. She tries to help explain things sometimes. Bless her heart. She will put her hand up and ask me to repeat things on behalf of the kids. But it works really well for us.

Do you have kids who are below grade level readers?

Oh, gosh, yes. Right across the hall from me is the reading specialist and she works with them. Some just passed the SOL by the skin of their chins. The reason we do binders is because of the reading level of the textbooks. They are 10th or 11th grade leveled books. The kids can't read or comprehend it. Therefore, we make our own books.

What does your day look like?

Come in, kids come to me, before first period. Once they are there they stay. They work on homework, puzzles, some games, breakfast, socialization, and unpacking getting ready for the day. Classes start at 8:05; I have personal planning third period and team planning fourth period. We meet as a team three times a week. During that time on the other two days we meet with resource teachers, special education or reading specialist. We talk about what is going on with the kids, what we need to focus on, what might be going on, that kind of thing. We, um, at least our team all eat lunch with the kids in the cafeteria. I have afternoon bus duty.

What are some other strategies you use for the below grade level readers?

Highlighting, writing in columns, looking for key words, breaking the paragraph down, chunking, some of these are coupled with worksheets of some kind, but have access to their notes. Sometimes when I use the textbook I will read it to them, and then if I get to a point at the end, I will ask them to create a summary. I usually model this for them. I do usually point out important things in the books. I know also that some of their parents aren't going to be able to help them, or understand it, or read it themselves. There are some kids who have IEPs, and they have materials, tests, quizzes read to them. I have someone who will listen to them read out loud. I let them work in groups. Within the seating chart, I try to put stronger students and weaker students together so that when they do group work there is one model in the group.

Describe how the reading specialist helps you?

Reading lab is an exploratory (not one of choice) (laugh). She does a lot of literature with them. She really works on reading skills. She does units with them and

they do papers, writing, activities, and math even, all related to the topic. She gives them instructions to follow (reading), like the gingerbread house project. She has them do four square activities and incorporates a lot of our vocabulary into her lessons. She doesn't teach my class, but she will ask me to help guide her in the direction of where particular kids need to be. She doesn't reteach our stuff but focus on reading.

I'd like to have a magic wand to help them, but really you know sometimes it is so frustrating. I'd love to give them the desire for reading. So many of them don't think it is important or have the desire. They don't see that eventually they will have to have a job. They will have to be able to read how to do things, warning labels, directions. They have to be able to read, and some don't have the desire or see it is important. It is so frustrating, same thing with math. They don't see it. It is frustrating. As far as, well I really don't know what the answer is. They need some reason to make it important to them. It is tough. I know one of the frustrating things is sometimes we wonder how they can get through elementary school and be in sixth, seventh, eighth, grade and not be able to write a sentence. Some of them are on primer level. How does that happen? How can they get to middle school and not know their multiplication tables, or be able to construct a simple sentence, or read above a second or third grade level? Then we see them getting frustrated. Then they throw their hands up and they are gone. One of the things as middle school teachers we have wondered how they have gotten this far. When they fail two academic classes in middle school we try to retain them. But we meet resistance. When they have been pushed along their whole school career, we are not benefiting them. That's all.

Thanks! Again, I really appreciate your help.

Interview with Debi, a sixth grade U.S. I History teacher.

Hi, thanks for agreeing to meet with me this morning. We will get started. How long have you been a teacher?

I have been a teacher for 10 years.

Have you taught in your current position for the 10 years?

Yes.

What is your highest degree?

I have completed my Master's and have one more class to complete for my Ed.S.

What area will your Ed.S. be in?

Administration.

What was your undergraduate major?

Biology at Hollins University.

Ok, think back to being a student of history and tell me what you remember about learning that content material.

Well, biology was my major, and in the couple of history classes I had, um, the format was mostly lecture, lecture and answering questions with a lot of independent reading.

Did you do well with that type of instruction?

Well, I did ok, but it wasn't very interesting.

Ok, now think back to high school or middle school and tell me what you remember about learning the content material.

Class, was, well a lot of copying notes from the board Monday through Thursday and having a quiz on Friday. Yuck.

Did you consider yourself a strong reader in middle school?

Not particularly. I didn't enjoy reading and didn't do it very often, especially not for pleasure. I didn't really read much until I was in college.

Do you remember how you learned to read?

Um, I remember that I was well behind where students are now. When I went to first grade, everyone was learning their alphabet. I don't remember specific strategies or activities, but I do remember that around second or third grade it did click for me and I could read. You know, about reading, no, I don't remember much except rote memorization.

Ok, now I'd like to ask about your roles and responsibilities here. Can you describe those for me?

I teach U.S. History five periods a day and I teach English sixth period. Do you want to know that I am History Department chair, and lead clinical chair? Things like that?

Yes. What is Lead Clinical Chair?

Well it means that I train teachers to mentor other teachers and serve as a mentor myself.

Can you describe your classes to me in detail? Like how they are set up, the students they are comprised of?

This year I have more homogenous groups than usual. I have one collaborative group and one what I would call a gifted group. Most of the classes have a fair mix of kids high and low, but the one group is mostly higher kids. I have a teacher work with me in the collaborative class but not for the whole class period. I have to share her. Typically, an average student can be found in most classes. My English 7 class is made up of gifted students.

In your groups, can you identify the students who read below grade level?

Yes, that is easy.

Ok. How do you teach those kids the content material? Do you use specific or different strategies for those kids?

Well, I used to teach a lot of varying degrees of differentiated lessons. But I figured out that what I was doing for the lower students was good for all students. The graphic organizers and note taking methods I use also help the higher level kids work more to their potential. I guess they are less confined. So the degrees of differentiation are not as noticeable, because I teach using many different modalities for everyone. I teach all of my classes as though they did not do their reading homework. I do assign reading homework and I do check it; however, I also teach as if no one has done it so that

everyone gets the same access to the material. I use different modalities so that everyone picks up on the information. The active board has been very helpful in that.

Is your reading homework usually from a textbook?

It is. We have a new textbook this year, and I think it is at a higher reading level than the previous textbook. What I try to do is have them focus on the questions at the end of each section and encourage them to look back and find the details. I try to help them focus rather read all of the information and have to tell me about it.

What particular strategies do you like to use as a teacher?

I guess my philosophy as a teacher is that I need to have transitions, and I need to have ways to teach to different modalities within each class period. To list my strategies in a nutshell would be difficult. But, when students first come in, they have a warm up, a question of the day. That gets everyone involved at the very beginning. Then we may review for five to ten minutes, something where everyone can be involved. Then we may do some note taking either in a graphic organizer form or in a “cloze” notes form. Um, I do use cloze notes for lower students, but I try to format the note taking so that it is something that everyone can participate in equally. I do some direct lecturing, but I try to do it in an interactive way so that I am not doing all the talking and the kids are interacting with the lecture and notes as well as each other.

Ok, thanks. Tell me a little bit about your collaborative class. The one you mentioned earlier.

I share a teacher with the other history class, so the teacher is only with me part of the time. We have used different collaborative models. Sometimes she stays in with me; sometimes she pulls kids out. We don't have a set format; we just look at the lessons and what the kids need on a particular day in the area of a particular topic.

Tell me about the support you receive for your below grade level kids.

Um, I don't think, well I don't think that history and science receive as much support as math and reading with students who are struggling. I think that those students receive support but not as much as they do for language arts. Sometimes the language arts teacher will come to me and ask what we are doing and try to tie it in to her lessons, but as far as support directly to my class for the lower kids, um, no, not as much. In a perfect world, I, uh, I would like to see history receive the same attention and focus as other academics. I would like to have resources and personnel to form small focus or remediation groups with a focus on history. I would have a full time person instead of sharing one with another teacher. I think that would be the best way to intervene and help them with the content area material with which they are struggling.

How much instruction on teaching reading did you receive in your undergraduate program?

I did have one class Reading in the Content Area. It was at the time when the SOL push began. There was a focus on content area reading.

Ok thanks. Is there anything else you'd like to add about any of the topics we have discussed or anything else?

Well, there is an issue with English Language Learners. We are in a time when we all have a need to develop a particular skill set to work with these students. While they may master some conversational skills, they are still struggling with vocabulary and learning concepts that they are unfamiliar with. This is becoming more and more of a problem due to the accountability.

Ok, well, thanks again for working with me. I am looking forward to being in your class later today for the observation.

Interview with Mary, a seventh grade civics teacher.

Thanks, Mary, for agreeing to meet with me and allow me to observe in your class later this afternoon.

No problem. I am a little nervous though.

Oh, don't be. This will be very easy for you. I just have some questions and it will be more like a conversation. Then during the observation, I will be watching your teaching, strategies, kids, and looking around the room. Nothing to worry about.

Ok.

So, the first question is how long have you been a teacher?

Nineteen years.

What is your highest degree?

I have a master's of teaching degree. I started out getting a master's in reading, but had a baby, and when I went back to finish, I changed my concentration to Master's of Teaching.

What was your major in college? Undergraduate?

History with a minor in education. I went to MBC, and that is also where I got my master's.

What subject area do you teach?

Civics.

Think back to when you were a student. Tell me what you remember about how you learned content material, like the content you teach.

Well, I remember my eighth grade civics teacher was also our senior government teacher when we got to 12th grade. We all liked her very much. She was very much into current events and relating them to what we learned. I remember taking notes on note cards, after reading a section of the textbook. Then we would trade the cards and ask each other questions. I remember she had us do a “current event” activity each week with newspaper articles. There were a couple of kids who never had theirs so I did them for them. I really liked that activity. We would have quizzes and tests after sections and units. There was an end of year exam, and I remember exactly where I sat in her class. Isn’t that funny?

Thanks, now think back a little further to when you were in elementary school and tell me what you can remember about learning to read.

Well, I will always remember the time I said to my first grade teacher, “Lady, I owe you some sugar.” That was because that is how we learned to remember our vowels in kindergarten . “lAdE I O U some sugar.” Anyway, my first grade teacher was not impressed. We read the same thing in first grade as a whole class from our reading books. Then when I went to second grade, the teacher used the SRA kits. I had the sole goal of getting through that box no matter what. Then, about half way through the year I started going out of the room with a small group of students to the special room. I thought it was because I finished the SRA box so quickly (giggle). I also remember doing book reports for the reading teacher and forgetting my book one day and having to

miss recess. Then, in about third grade, I discovered Nancy Drew and never looked back. I just started reading those books like crazy. I remember we would get little colorful marshmallows when we read a paragraph without missing a word. That was a great incentive for me. I don't remember the exact way I learned to read, but I know that once I gained some confidence and focus and found books that I really liked, it became easier. I was never really a teacher pleaser, which may be why it took a little longer.

Were you a good reader as a middle school student?

I didn't have a middle school experience. We went from seventh grade to high school as eighth graders. However, I was a good reader as a seventh and eighth grader. I liked my eighth grade literature teacher a lot. She read poetry to us and talked about it, and that was so much fun.

Describe your roles and responsibilities as a content teacher.

Well, I am responsible for teaching the minimum standards, but more than that, I am responsible for helping these students make connections between what they learn and their lives. They need to see that learning is not a separate part of their lives but an integral part of their lives. So, I try to be enthusiastic about learning and a bit dramatic to keep their attention and show the importance of learning. Of course I have a SOL test at the end of the year and I want them to do well on that. I also have school duties such as bus duty, lunch duty, committee assignments, and things like that.

Describe to me the classes you teach.

You mean the kids in the classes? Like the makeup of the classes?

Yes.

Ok, well I teach five periods a day. First period I am in the office for support. Then third period I have planning. My civics classes are second, fourth, fifth, and sixth periods. Then I have a smart block seventh period. One of the classes is a group of inclusion students where I also have the assistance of a special education teacher and a paraprofessional for the class. Then the other classes are pretty much heterogeneously grouped. There is one group that is a bit “higher” than the others and I can really have some good discussions with them. The lower inclusion group can be challenging not so much academically, but behaviorally. The kids get frustrated and want to act out, but I usually get them back on track.

Do you have below grade level students or readers in all of your classes or just in your inclusion class?

They are mostly in that group, but there are some in the other groups who struggle as well. They may be able to read fluently, but comprehension is an issue because of lack of background knowledge or lack of vocabulary experiences.

What specific instructional strategies do you use to reach the below level students?

Well, I use the same strategies for all kids, but I realize some need more or less of one thing and more or less of something else. For example, I may provide notes to some students, but I still have the expectation that they will participate in note taking activities. Whenever I assign writing assignments in civics, I give those who struggle with reading and/or writing graphic organizers. I also use the overhead and a projector so that kids can

see what I am talking about. I use current events activities and cooperative grouping. I also use interactive note taking and hands on activities whenever possible. If kids are struggling with reading the textbook I will assign the class to read and then ask the ones struggling to come read with me. I am sure there are other things I do, just can't think right now. Oh, I like to give the kids practice in giving presentations. I think that is a huge confidence booster and once they have confidence in their abilities, they will improve.

What support do you get in working with below level readers?

In the inclusion class, I have a special education teacher and an aide. We can usually divide and conquer in that class. It is the largest class, but since there are three of us it is very manageable. We can do three rotations on some days of small group instruction on the topic. For example, I can have a small group with me reading a section from the textbook; they can rotate to the special education teacher to discuss what they read or write about it; and then they can rotate to the paraprofessional for additional comprehension practice or special work on a project. It is a nice way to structure the class because no one is sitting around, and all of the kids get the best of all three of us. We also have a reading teacher at our school who teaches specific reading skills to at risk kids. She works with them on content material but also reads novels and practices comprehension and writing with them.

Is there anything else you'd like to add about reading in the content area?

I think I do a pretty good job with teaching content material. I think my reading background and the fact that I taught elementary school for the first half of my career

come in very handy in working with kids who are below grade level. Whenever another middle school teacher asks, “How did they get this far and still are so far behind?” I can say, you should have seen where they came from and how far they have come.

Thanks for your time. I will see you shortly in the classroom.

Appendix G

Main Study Observation Form

Name: _____

Date: _____

Time: _____

Briefly describe the students in the class.

Activities observed in classroom.

Was a textbook used? If so, describe how?

Were there reading activities during the lesson? If so, describe.

Describe the physical classroom (the look).

Describe the level of engagement of the students.

Describe instructional strategies used by the teacher.

Describe other observations.

Observation 1

Name: Mary (civics)

Date: May 2, 2011

Time: 11:40 a.m.

Briefly describe the students in the class.

There were 25 seventh grade students in the class. They were seated at five tables (five to a table). There were also two empty tables. At one of the empty tables sat an additional teacher (the special education teacher). There were 12 girls and 13 boys in the class. They seemed very curious about my presence.

Activities observed in classroom.

The teacher began by introducing me and explaining my purpose for being in the classroom. Next, she introduced the lesson for the day with a warm up activity (a review). She reviewed what they had completed in class the day before (which would have been a Friday) and told them what they would be doing during this class period. The objective was to define the importance of individual voting. She used examples from the recent SCA election as examples of how each vote counts. The teacher then split the kids into two groups. The first group would be reading a section from the textbook with the other teacher in the room, the second group would be working with her to define voting. I observed the group working directly with the classroom teacher. They came together at two tables. Each student brought his or her notebook and a pencil. The teacher asked that they write down everything they could think of that they had voted for.

Most of the items the students wrote down were school related (SCA, favorite lunch, class representatives, and movies to watch). Then she asked them why it was important for them to get to vote and what it meant to them to have a “say” in the decisions that were made. Several students volunteered answers. Then she began to explain how the local government officials (City Council) were elected. She had actual newspaper results of the most recent election to show the students. She explained that the numbers they saw represented their parents’ votes, their teachers’ votes, and even her vote was shown in the numbers. The students were quite intrigued by this. She then asked them to write down all the decisions that they thought City Council made that impacted them and their families. Once the list was compiled, they shared their thoughts. Most students wrote about taxes and rules. She then gave them a list of decisions that City Council had made. She told them to think about all of those decisions and how would they have voted. She told the students that they would go a little deeper into that discussion and talk about the voting process tomorrow. The groups switched, and the group I had been observing went to the other tables to read a section from the textbook about voting procedures. The special education teacher assisted with reading. She had the students take turns and helped them with some words. At the end of the reading assignment, the students were to work in groups of two to decide what the most important facts were from what they read.

Was a textbook used? If so, describe how.

The textbook was used. The students read a short section from it.

Were there reading activities during the lesson? If so, describe.

The reading activities were direct reading from the textbook, writing activities, and comprehension activities.

Describe the physical classroom (the look).

The room was a bit small for the number of students. It was very neat and organized. There were tables instead of desks. The teacher did tell me she felt like she had more room this way. There were book cases with textbooks and novels displayed. Posters appropriately displayed the content.

Describe the level of engagement of the students.

The students were actively engaged and all willingly participated in the activities.

Describe instructional strategies used by the teacher.

The teacher used brainstorming, writing, sharing, discussion, modeling, and directed listening thinking activities as strategies during this lesson.

Describe other observations.

The teacher had an excellent rapport with the students. They were comfortable talking with her and she was very accepting of their answers. She seemed to engage the students with her actions, tone of voice, and overall feeling of high expectations. At one point a student became a bit argumentative about writing part of the assignment. She told him that at this point her classroom was not a democracy, and he did not have a vote on whether or not he did the assignment. She told him he was too smart to be so lazy, so he should get busy and try to impress her. He grinned and got to work.

Observation 2

Name: Kim (sixth grade history)

Date: April 25, 2011

Time: 8:30 a.m.

Briefly describe the students in the class.

The class was made up of 24 students. The students were heterogeneously grouped meaning there were varying levels of ability within the same classroom. There were 14 boys and 10 girls in the classroom. The desks were arranged in rows and students were seated alphabetically.

Activities observed in classroom.

The lesson began with a few reminders of good student behavior. Each student was then asked to take his or her textbooks and turn to page 200. They were asked to read silently for a few minutes. As the student read silently, the teacher walked up and down the rows and stated she was available for assistance if anyone needed it. I noted that there were several students finished reading quickly, and there were also a few who did not read the paragraph that had been assigned. Next, the teacher asked the students what was the “big deal” about what they read (the paragraph was about the Emancipation Proclamation). No one volunteered an answer at first. Then, a female student stated that this was a very important document because it changed history. The class then began to discuss the importance of the Emancipation Proclamation and why Abraham Lincoln wrote it. The teacher led the discussion making sure to touch on each part of the

paragraph that had been read. This was important because those who did not read were not participating in the discussion. Once the discussion was completed, the activity was repeated for the next section (paragraph) except the teacher asked the students to select a buddy and have one person read the paragraph to the other. This was an adaptive move on the teacher's part as she noticed those who were not engaged previously and paired them up with someone who was engaged and had the engaged student read the paragraph. Another discussion took place regarding the impact of the Emancipation Proclamation on the Civil War. The discussion was good and the teacher followed up by giving the students a pre-typed study guide that contained most of the information from the discussion.

Was a textbook used? If so, describe how?

The textbook was used as the springboard for the group discussions and notes.

Were there reading activities during the lesson? If so, describe.

The reading activities associated with the lesson included reading from the text book independently, with a buddy, and follow up discussion.

Describe the physical classroom (the look).

The classroom seemed small, but there were a lot of kids in it. The desks were arranged in rows (for space's sake) and the teacher's desk was in the center of the room (not at the front). This allowed more movement for the teacher and students. Displays were representative of the content being studied (Civil War). There were colorful crates on the counter that contained additional activities for students.

Describe the level of engagement of the students.

Most students were engaged in the lesson and discussion.

Describe instructional strategies used by the teacher.

The teacher used a Directed Reading Teaching Activity (DRTA) approach combined with note-taking and strategic questioning. She asked questions that caused the students to think and expand on their answers such as “what impact did that have?” and “so what would have happened if ..”

Describe other observations.

The teacher was very familiar with the content and material of the lesson. She rarely had to reference the book herself to lead the discussion or formulate questions.

Observation 3

Name: Jack (sixth grade history)

Date: April 26, 2011

Time: 10:30 a.m.

Briefly describe the students in the class.

The class was composed of 15 students. This group of students is considered the “lower” group. They had a paraprofessional with them throughout the class period.

There were eight boys and seven girls.

Activities observed in classroom.

The class was working on a project that identified the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments. They had been divided into three groups. Each group had been assigned an amendment. They had selected the type of product they wanted to design to promote their amendment (poster, speech, picture collage, or chart). Each group was working fairly independently with assistance from the teacher and the paraprofessional. This activity was a smaller piece of the unit that focused on the Reconstruction period.

Was a textbook used? If so, describe how?

Textbooks were not directly used in this lesson; however, several students had their textbooks open to use to locate information for their topic. They were using them as a resource.

Were there reading activities during the lesson? If so, describe.

Students needed to read resources (internet, textbook, articles) in order to find the correct information for their project.

Describe the physical classroom (the look).

The classroom was neatly organized and very clean. It is a newly remodeled school and sparkled. The room was a good size; there was updated technology (overhead projector, smart boards, and computers) throughout the classroom. Displays were relevant to the content and not overdone.

Describe the level of engagement of the students.

All students were engaged in the activity and seemed to be working at the appropriate level. They did not hesitate to ask questions, offer advice to each other, and express frustration appropriately.

Describe instructional strategies used by the teacher.

The teacher served as the facilitator during this observation. He helped students find what they needed to complete the objectives he had previously given them.

Describe other observations.

The teacher had an excellent rapport with the students. He was very helpful and complimentary of their work.

Observation 4

Name: John (sixth grade history)

Date: April 14, 2011

Time: 2:20 p.m.

Briefly describe the students in the class.

This class was composed of 22 students. There were 11 girls and 11 boys. The class was heterogeneously grouped. The students sat at six tables with three to four students at each table. They were not grouped in a special way at their tables, but it was obvious from behaviors that several were not seated together purposefully.

Activities observed in classroom.

The lesson observed focused on women's rights and the rights that they have gained. The lesson began with the teacher explaining the first women's rights convention and the fact that it was held in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York. The teacher explained that this was part of the progressive movement. The students read a section from their textbooks (round robin volunteer style). Next, the teacher asked them to focus on the increased educational opportunities that women had gained and give some examples of women in the work environment that is now possible because of this movement. Next, they discussed other benefits of the progressive movement for women, including the 19th Amendment and the right to vote. The students were asked to describe what their lives would be like now had this not occurred. Then they were asked to describe some other groups who have had to fight for rights. The lesson concluded with review of notes on

the Progressive movement. The teacher gave each student a copy of the notes that were presented in cloze fashion (not complete) and asked them to work with a buddy to complete the notes and to please let him know if they could not find the answer. He let them know they would check tomorrow to make sure everyone got the right answers.

Was a textbook used? If so, describe how?

The textbook was used to read and gather information from round robin style reading.

Were there reading activities during the lesson? If so, describe.

The reading activities included reading from the text book and assimilating facts, opinions, and discussion from what was read.

Describe the physical classroom (the look).

The students were seated at tables. The room was neat and uncluttered. The displays were relevant to the content being studied. Maps were displayed as well as a chart showing the Amendments to the US Constitution. Books were neatly arranged on a book shelf. Computers were set up near the windows for students to use.

Describe the level of engagement of the students.

Students were actively engaged and interested in the topic. Several (males) thought it was funny that women used to not have the same rights as men, but the girls handled this very well.

Describe instructional strategies used by the teacher.

The teacher used a Directed Reading Thinking Activity approach which included discussion and a good variety of leveled questions to keep the students thinking.

Describe other observations.

The teacher had a great rapport with the students. He was very familiar with the content being taught. He discussed the information in a “story” format that flowed and was very interesting.

Observation 5

Name: Gretchen (seventh grade science)

Date: April 8, 2011

Time: 9:50 a.m.

Briefly describe the students in the class.

There were 11 seventh grade students in this science class. As class began, the teacher announced that they would have a moment to visit with the visitor that the teacher from another class had brought today. The visitor was a hedgehog. It was really exciting for the students. They each got to see the hedgehog and touch it. Next, they all returned to their seats. The teacher explained that she knew the hedgehog was a hard act to follow but she really wanted them to settle down and focus – and they did. They had a “bell ringer” warm up activity on the board, and as they completed th, the teacher gathered some materials. Then they discussed the answers to the bell ringer activity. They brainstormed and discussed each idea that was given. The teacher accepted all ideas and gave them value. Each idea was integrated into the lesson. Next, they got their interactive notebooks out and turned to a new section. They added “Birds” to the table of contents of the notebook. She asked the students to complete the notes using pages 400 – 409 from their textbooks. The fact sheet included questions such as what class do bird belong in, how did they get their name, what characteristics do they share, what are two types of feathers, and many more.

Activities observed in classroom.

The teacher used interactive note taking as a strategy. As the students read from the textbook they found the answers to the questions on the previously prepared notes. The group was able to read the text independently. Some had questions about what they had read and the teacher answered them. The teacher helped the students take ownership of the work by not directly giving them the answers, but rather referred them to the correct place to look. Brainstorming and leveled questioning (on the notes page) were used as strategies along with discussion.

Was a textbook used? If so, describe how?

The textbook was used as a resource to find answers to the notes pages.

Were there reading activities during the lesson? If so, describe.

Reading activities included reading from the text and identifying correct answers.

Describe the physical classroom (the look).

The room was set up so that students were seated at lab tables. There was ample room and it was very neat and clean. Displays were relevant to the science curriculum.

Describe the level of engagement of the students.

Students were engaged in the activity and worked to completion.

Describe instructional strategies used by the teacher.

Brainstorming, DRTA, interactive note taking and leveled questioning were used in this lesson as instructional strategies.

Describe other observations.

The teacher had good rapport with the students. Some students were a little “sassy,” and the teacher did not correct what could have been perceived as disrespect. However, they completed the work and engaged in the lesson.

Observation 6

Name: Donna (seventh grade civics)

Date: April 8, 2011

Time: 12:30 p.m.

Briefly describe the students in the class.

The class consisted of 21 students. The desks were arranged in rows and there was not a lot of additional space in the classroom (it seemed small). The displays on the walls were relevant to the content, and the room was not cluttered. The teacher's area was neat and organized.

Activities observed in classroom.

The lesson began with the teacher introducing the Geography Fair award winners. Students were congratulated and recognized for their work and participation. Then she asks the kids to get out their homework from their binder. They reviewed the worksheet as a whole class. The teacher then asked questions about the work such as what does ** mean, why did you select that answer, etc. She then reviewed several vocabulary words that were embedded in the work sheet. The teacher used an "interactive note taking" approach in that the kids had pre-made notes and they were to complete the notes using the textbook or by listening to the discussion. The teacher used the smart board and had an interactive vocabulary activity selected in order to review the vocabulary words. The students were dragging words to match the correct definition. She assisted several students with reading questions.

Was a textbook used? If so, describe how?

The textbook was used as a resource for the worksheet and for definitions for vocabulary words.

Were there reading activities during the lesson? If so, describe.

The reading activities consisted of reading the worksheet, the textbook, and the vocabulary words and definitions.

Describe the physical classroom (the look).

The room was small. It was neat and clean, and displays represented what the kids were working on.

Describe the level of engagement of the students.

Most students were engaged throughout the lesson. There were not behavior problems; however, several were not paying attention during the vocabulary exercise.

Describe instructional strategies used by the teacher.

The teacher used interactive note taking, discussion, and group work to complete the lesson.

Describe other observations.

The teacher seemed to teach in a continuing manner without pausing much for additional learning opportunities. She stayed very much on task.

Observation 7

Name: Sarah (sixth grade science)

Date: April 8, 2011

Time: 8:10 a.m.

Briefly describe the students in the class.

This was a small science class of 12 students. They were heterogeneously grouped and very well behaved. There were seven girls and five boys.

Activities observed in classroom.

The class began with a student reporting on the daily weather. The teacher used the Elmo white board to show the class weather chart and to mark the day's readings on the chart. Next the teacher reported that they would be drawing the layers of the atmosphere today. She asked leading questions about the layers of the atmosphere. She then placed a blank diagram of the layers of atmosphere on the Elmo and began talking about the troposphere. As she colored in her layer and added pictures of things that belong in that layer, she discussed the layer using vocabulary words and questions. She continued with this activity until all layers had been completed.

Was a textbook used? If so, describe how?

The textbook was not used.

Were there reading activities during the lesson? If so, describe.

There were no reading activities.

Describe the physical classroom (the look).

The class was set up so that students were seated in desks that made pods. It was very roomy, clean, and neat. There was a trout tank, a weather station, and a physical science station.

Describe the level of engagement of the students.

The students were all engaged and worked through the activity to completion. They had a great deal of knowledge to share about the layers of the atmosphere.

Describe instructional strategies used by the teacher.

The teacher used modeling, Direct Listening and Thinking Approach (DLTA), and basic questioning strategies.

Describe other observations.

This lesson was stimulating and interesting. The teacher had good rapport with the kids. She demonstrated all work. The classroom displays were relevant, and there were a lot of visuals for the kids to use as references. She also used interactive note taking as a strategy.

Observation 8

Name: Charlie (sixth grade U.S.I History I teacher)

Date: April 19, 2011

Time: 8:00 a.m.

Briefly describe the students in the class.

There were 22 students in the class. Twelve were girls and 10 were boys. They were heterogeneously grouped.

Activities observed in classroom.

The students entered the room at the bell and had a warm up activity “bell ringer” waiting on them. The teacher read an excerpt from a book that described a night in battle during the Civil War. It was graphic and descriptive. He asked that the students close their eyes while he read. Most did. Once he was finished reading he asked that they open their eyes and treat the discussion of the Civil War with the respect it deserves. The class was very well behaved and very engaged after this exercise. They began to discuss the important people of the Civil War. They used their notebooks as resources to add to the discussion. At the end of the discussion, they played a trivia game using the Elmo and Smart Board. The game was great! The kids were completely engaged.

Was a textbook used? If so, describe how?

A textbook was not used for this lesson.

Were there reading activities during the lesson? If so, describe.

Reading activities consisted of using notes to add to discussion.

Describe the physical classroom (the look).

The room was arranged in rows with the teacher's desk to the side. There was a large white board in front where most of the instruction took place. Displays were content relevant.

Describe the level of engagement of the students.

The students were engaged throughout the lesson.

Describe instructional strategies used by the teacher.

The teacher used "mood setting," discussion, games, questions, and interactive note taking during the observation.

Describe other observations.

The teacher was very familiar with the content material and it was obvious by the displays, games, and resources that he spent time preparing for the lesson.

Observation 9

Name: Elizabeth (seventh grade U.S. History)

Date: April 19, 2011

Time: 2:30 p.m.

Briefly describe the students in the class.

The class was composed of 21 students. There were nine girls and 12 boys. This class was heterogeneously grouped but contained the seventh grade students with special needs. A special education teacher was in the class with the regular content teacher for part of the class period (about 30 minutes).

Activities observed in class.

The class began with a warm up activity that was displayed on the overhead when the students came in. As the students worked on the warm up activity, the special education teacher circulated to check for homework completion. There was some confusion about one of the questions, and the teacher stopped to explain the difference between McCarthy and MacArthur. She also explained the difference between “arm’s race” and “brinkmanship.” Next the students looked to their unit organizers. The unit organizer is a form of interactive note taking. It breaks the unit down into smaller pieces and gives a good look at the big picture as well as individual topics within each objective. This unit organizer framed the Korean War. The teacher had students read from the textbook before completing each section of the organizer. It was evident that she had read the material and designed the organizer based on the information in the text. The

students worked individually, in groups, and as a class to complete the Korean War information sheet. The teacher questioned the students throughout the lesson, having them make connections to previous material and asking for the big picture ideas.

Was a textbook used? If so, describe how?

The textbook was used as the resource for completion of the assignment.

Were there reading activities during the lesson? If so, describe.

Students read from the textbooks silently and aloud. They also read from the unit organizer.

Describe the physical classroom (the look).

The classroom was roomy. There was ample space, and the desks were arranged in pods of four to allow for group work. The displays were relevant to the unit being completed.

Describe the level of engagement of the students.

Students were engaged and worked to completion of the assignment. No off task behavior was observed. The additional teacher in the classroom aided some students who may have had trouble reading.

Describe instructional strategies used by the teacher.

The teacher used interactive note taking, discussion, questioning, group work, and direct whole class instruction. She also asked the student to compare and contrast.

Describe other observations.

The teacher had an excellent rapport with the students. The additional teacher in the classroom was an asset to the success of the lesson in that he was able to assist some students who were having some difficulty, which allowed others to keep moving forward. The teacher asked the students several many higher level questions. They met her expectations with their answers and by thinking out loud to work through scenarios.

Observation 10

Name: Dolly (sixth grade science)

Date: May 5, 2011

Time: 9:00 a.m.

Briefly describe the students in the class.

This class was composed of 20 students seated at tables. There were eight girls and 12 boys. The class was heterogeneously grouped.

Activities observed in classroom.

After the morning announcements, the teacher began by letting the student know they would continue their discussion of rotation and revolution. They also were told they would be completing their unit organizers. The students got their notebooks with their interactive note pages (unit organizers) out, and the discussion began. The teacher asked questions such as what is revolution, what is rotation, how long does it take for the Earth to rotate/revolve, what happens to the one-fourth day that is accumulated, what does rotation bring us, what are the four types of phenomena that revolution brings, and so on. The discussion and the question were higher level than basic knowledge. The students used application and synthesis skills to answer the questions and formulate theories. The teacher expanded the unit map and organizer by having students read from page 44 in their textbooks. They used this page to complete the new topic organizer and could also use it for homework.

Was a textbook used? If so, describe how?

The textbook was used as a reference tool for finding information that needed to be completed on the organizer.

Were there reading activities during the lesson? If so, describe.

Students read from the overhead, their organizers, the textbook, and their notes during the lesson.

Describe the physical classroom (the look).

The room was neat and clean. Displays were all student created and very representative of the content.

Describe the level of engagement of the students.

Students were engaged throughout the lesson. Several were uninterested in the review discussion but became more engaged once the new material was introduced.

Describe instructional strategies used by the teacher.

The teacher used DRTA and DLTA approaches to the material. She used interactive note taking, questioning strategies, group work, and direct instruction.

Describe other observations.

The teacher was very proud of her students' work. She wanted to make sure the observer saw all displays and took time to explain them to me. She also took time to show me the unit organizers and topic organizers and how they worked. She explained how she treasures the notebooks the kids create and encourages them to keep them

through the eighth grade so they can use them as a study guide. She had an excellent rapport with her students and valued each answer they gave.

Observation 11

Name: Debi (sixth grade U.S. History)

Date: May 5, 2011

Time: 10:20 a.m.

Briefly describe the students in the class.

This class consisted of 24 students. There were 13 girls and 11 boys. The students were heterogeneously grouped, but the class contained several special education students. A paraprofessional offered additional support for the classroom teacher.

Activities observed in classroom.

The class began with a bell ringer activity. The students took their seats and used their notebook to help work on the bell ringer activity. The question of the day (bell ringer) was an analogy. _____ is to _____ as Clara Barton is to the Red Cross. The answer was Robert Smalls is to Union Navy. Next, the students took five minutes to work on the unit organizer. They could do this independently or together. Then the teacher displayed the organizer on the smart board in front of the class. The class then proceeded with a discussion of the fill ins for the organizer and completed it together. The discussion was thought provoking and question rich in that the questions asked by the teacher engaged the students and enabled them to think about connections. There were also questions that tied what they were studying to the present.

Was a textbook used? If so, describe how?

The textbook was not used.

Were there reading activities during the lesson? If so, describe.

The students read their notebooks and organizer information to complete the assignment.

Describe the physical classroom (the look).

The classroom was neat and clean. The displays were relevant to the content. The desks were arranged in rows. The classroom was small and felt a bit crowded, but the teacher made good use of the space.

Describe the level of engagement of the students.

The students were actively engaged in the lesson. They seemed to be motivated by the change and variety of activities (bell ringer to group work to independent work to whole group work).

Describe instructional strategies used by the teacher.

The teacher used questioning strategies, discussion, DLT, interactive note taking, and compare and contrast. She was very familiar with the content and was completely at ease providing instruction for the students.

Describe other observations.

The teacher had a good rapport with the students and seemed to know them well. She spoke on a personal level with several students regarding a ball game and congratulated another on a track accomplishment.

Observation 12

Name: Julie (seventh grade science)

Date: May 9, 2011

Time: 8:45 a.m.

Briefly describe the students in the class.

The class consisted of 17 seventh grade science students. They were seated at tables. There were seven boys and 10 girls. The class was heterogeneously grouped. There were two students who seemed to be asleep in the back of the room at a table.

Activities observed in classroom.

Once the teacher began talking, the two students in the back of the room sat up and fully participated. The teacher began with an interactive vocabulary review. She had vocabulary words and their definitions displayed. The students used the interactive board to “drag” the word to the correct definition. If it was a correct match, a fish jumped beside the question. If it was incorrect, the fish sank. The words were part of a study on populations. Competition, cooperation, social hierarchy, territorial imperative, and population were some of the words used. At the conclusion of this activity the students added the words to their notebook and wrote in the definitions. The visual was left on the board for the students to copy. The teacher allowed about 15 minutes for this activity and then began a discussion of the lesson. She described some ways that members of groups or populations interact with each other and used the students as examples. She then asked them to give her examples of interactions such as competition and so on. The

students participated in the activity. Next, they discussed individual behaviors and how one behavior can influence or change the behavior of the group. This was a good discussion, and the students made excellent connections. As the discussion moved forward, they compared and contrasted different populations and types of cooperation and competition.

Was a textbook used? If so, describe how?

A textbook was not used.

Were there reading activities during the lesson? If so, describe.

The students read their vocabulary words and their notes individually.

Describe the physical classroom (the look).

The classroom looked very much like a science room. There were lab tables, science charts, a trout tank (the fish were to be released into a local stream in the upcoming week), ample space and clearly displayed safety rules. The room was a good size.

Describe the level of engagement of the students.

The students were engaged in the conversation and discussion and seemed to enjoy talking as they learned.

Describe instructional strategies used by the teacher.

The teacher used the DLTA, compare and contrast, direct instruction through discussion, and group work.

Describe other observations.

This class was very relaxed. They were engaged in the content and had excellent behavior.

Appendix H

Pilot Study Interviews

Interview with Carver (eighth grade world history teacher)

Hi Carver, thank for meeting with me today to help me get this study started. I really appreciate your help.

No problem. I hope I can be of some help.

Well, the first interview question is how long have you been a teacher?

Well, this is my fifteenth year.

Have all of those years been here? Teaching world history?

Oh, no. I taught at ** High School and requested to move to the middle school. When I first started teaching here, I taught civics. Then civics was moved to the seventh grade and I remained in the eighth grade and started teaching world history, which I like a lot better anyway.

What was your major in college?

History. But I didn't teach right away. I started out working in industry and manufacturing. I was a manager and supervisor, but the company I worked for moved. So I went back to school and got the teaching endorsement. I was really glad that I had finished college and was able to do this as a second career. It doesn't pay near what I used to make, but it is much less stress and I really do enjoy it.

You stated you have taught civics and world history, how do you remember learning that material yourself when you were in school?

Well, I haven't thought about that in a long time. I think we read the textbooks a lot. I don't remember the subjects being so subdivided as they are now. Of course, a lot of the history I teach now, from the Vietnam War on has happened in my adult life, so I didn't learn that in school (laugh). But I remember mostly the teacher talking about it and telling us stories, like I do with my students. There were some worksheets and paper work, but mostly reading and vocabulary.

Were you a good reader as a middle school student?

Well, remember we didn't have middle school. But at the middle school age, I could read what I needed to. But didn't like to read so didn't do it very often.

Do you remember how you learned to read?

Oh, no. I remember being in a class with kids of other ages, and I guess they had failed. I remember practicing reading sentences and spelling words. I don't actually remember the instruction.

Ok, now on to the present. Describe your roles and responsibilities as a content teacher.

I have specific objectives and standards that I am responsible for teaching. I try to teach them in a way that the kids are engaged and interested. I relate well to the boys especially the ones who like to goof off and carry on. I was like that. I can usually reel them back in with a hunting or fishing story and then go right back to history, and they

will get back on track. I also have school committees and duties. I have a great team, and we work together well.

Describe the classes you teach.

I have five periods of world history each day. The classes are mixed up, not tracked for the most part. There is one class with the majority of special education students in it, but there is a paraprofessional that comes with that class to assist with instruction and modification of assignments. The kids are pretty good. There are some who can be a handful, but they listen to me. There are a few who really struggle in school, but I think they have not figured out the importance of school yet. There are some who struggle because they can't help it and some who could help themselves but don't. You know what I mean?

Do you have students in your classes who are below level readers?

Oh yes.

What strategies do you use to teach those students the content material?

Well, I use a variety of things with all of the students. We do projects, group work, and I will read the lesson from the book to them if I need to or pair them up with someone I know will help them and keep them focused. Sometimes, I have the paraprofessional work with the group that can't read the text and she will read it to them, or I will. I use a lot of visual cues, timelines, and even though I lecture, I do so in a way that keeps them interested. I try to lecture in a story format so that it is interesting. Since

some of the kids can't read the material, they can hear about it and then learn how to process it.

What else would you like to add about reading in the content area or below grade level learners?

I was not taught how to teach reading. That always seemed to be the job of the elementary teachers. I guess since they don't always learn before they get here to us though we should be able to do something to help them. I know they get frustrated when they don't understand or can't read the material, but I can't stop my instruction to teach reading. I can only give them alternative ways to understand and comprehend the material. That helps them with world history, but not with reading.

Thanks for your time again.

You are welcome.