

IMPLEMENTATION OF *READ TO BE READY* INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES: A CASE  
STUDY

by

Jessica Danielle Bigham

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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APPROVED BY:

Sarah Pannone Ed.D., Committee Chair

James Swezey Ed.D., Committee Member

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this embedded case study was to describe the implementation of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices by elementary grades teachers. The issue this study investigated were the factors that affected the transfer of the *Read to Be Ready* practices, first used in a summer literacy camp environment, to the general classroom environment for 12 elementary teachers in southeast Tennessee. The theory that guided this study was Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which explains the relationship between behaviors and reinforcements and describes what influences human behavior. The research answered the question of what are the experiences teachers have when implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in their general classroom settings. The research was accomplished using qualitative methods of data collection and analysis to include observations, personal interviews, and document analysis. The data was coded to segment information and provide descriptions of themes that emerged. A type of pattern matching, called explanation building, was used to present a narrative explanation about the case. The data collected from these participants helped explain the implementation process teachers experienced when implementing these reading practices in their general classroom settings. Results from this research indicated that teachers who implemented *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices experienced a shift in mind-set regarding teaching methodology and required supports such as further training, administrator and district support, and access to high-quality resources. The benefits of implementation outweighed the costs, as teachers noticed growth in student literacy skills, improvement in student engagement toward reading tasks, and renewed student motivation and confidence towards reading.

*Keywords:* early literacy, professional development transfer, reading instruction, *Read to Be Ready*

Copyright Page

## Dedication

This manuscript is dedicated to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, whose help I depended on to do *all* things throughout this process of research. It is also dedicated to my husband, Jared, who stayed up with me countless nights past bedtime, boosting my confidence, cheering me on, and proofreading my manuscripts. Also, to my three wonderful children, Sydney, Starleigh, and Maverick, I could not have made it this far without their encouragement, which triply motivated me to accomplish my dream of completing a doctorate. Finally, to my mother, Cynthia, who tirelessly read stacks of books to me as a young child and turned me into a life-long reader and thinker.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

English Language Learner (ELL)

International Reading Association (IRA)

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

National Early Literacy Panel (NELP)

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)

Professional Development (PD)

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE)

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)

World Economic Forum (WEF)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

So often, language arts are viewed by many as a core content class, a curriculum, and an accountability measure, but language arts by definition are the subjects such as reading, spelling, literature, and composition that aim to develop students' comprehension and capacity for the use of written and oral language (Smagorinsky, 2015). In recent years, language arts has been framed through a programmatic lens that incorporates mandated remediation, interventions, and literacy integration across subject areas (Glaus, 2014; Halladay & Duke, 2013; Reutzell, 2013). With these extra demands, teachers are pressured to have their students demonstrate achievement of standards rather than the enjoyment of literature, and often there is no time left for students to refine the skills associated with language acquisition. From year to year, state departments of education change assessment practices, revise or add new literacy standards, and increase achievement expectations for student performance. Within this continuum of constant change, students appear to have gaps in their literacy development, and many low-income and minority elementary students seem to be caught in a cycle of catch up, never meeting proficiency standards in reading from year to year (August & Shanahan, 2009; Keiffer, 2010; Strand, 2014).

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading assessment is administered every two years to fourth, eighth, and twelfth-grade students across the United States. This assessment is considered to be the most standardized and nationally representative sample of what American students know in core content areas such as reading and mathematics (NAEP, 2017). The most current NAEP results revealed that nationwide, only 36% of fourth-grade students performed at or above proficiency levels in reading (The Nation's Report Card, 2017). In the state of Tennessee, only 33% of fourth-graders scored at or above proficient levels

on the NAEP reading test (The Nation's Report Card, 2017).

In addition, students across the United States who come from low-income and minority backgrounds continued to score lower on tests of reading proficiency than their peers who come from higher-income or Caucasian families (The Nation's Report Card, 2017). In Tennessee, only one-third of economically disadvantaged students reached proficiency on standardized reading tests (TDOE, 2016). Regardless of gender, race, or intelligence, children from low-income homes demonstrated significantly greater losses in reading scores at the beginning of a new school year when compared to students from middle-class homes, "and there is no evidence that the gap between these two groups of students is dissipating" (Bowers & Schwarz, 2018, p. 99). The early disadvantages of growing up in a low-income home may generate a "social stratification of knowledge" (Pollard-Durodola et al., 2015, p. 107) that begins at home and is perpetuated in the school setting where primary grades teachers have little guidance on how to accelerate oral language and vocabulary learning.

To address the concerns over low literacy levels in Tennessee schools, Governor, Bill Haslam, and Commissioner of Education, Candice McQueen, developed an initiative to help raise state-wide testing scores in reading. The large aim of the initiative was to increase third grade reading achievement to 75% proficiency by the year 2025, and it was called *Read to Be Ready*. Funding provided for this initiative was used to help districts purchase literacy resources, to improve outreach for struggling readers, and to increase research and training on using evidence-based practices in the classrooms. One part of the initiative paid for regional coaches to work with districts and help guide and instruct teachers on how to use these evidence-based practices for improving their reading instruction.

In this chapter, the historical, social, and theoretical backgrounds that gird this study on

the examination of the implementation process of *Read to Be Ready* practices will be explored. The problem statement and purpose statement of this research will be stated. As Chapter One progresses, it will seek to explain how this research is historically relevant and significant empirically, practically, and theoretically.

## **Background**

The background section of this research will explain the historical, social, and theoretical components of literacy development that are relevant to the impetus of *Read to Be Ready*. In the broader context, *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices have come out of the research and literature, which guide this study and seem to have their place in the conversation on early literacy development.

### **Historical Background**

In the 1950's and 1960's, a controversy arose in early literacy instruction, commonly referred to as The Great Debate (Baumann, Hoffman, Moon, & Duffy-Hester, 1998; Chall, 1967; Flesch, 1955). This debate was about whether reading instruction should have a phonics approach or a "look-say approach" (Baumann et al., 1998, p. 636), and this debate eventually evolved into the more contemporary debate over whether phonics or whole language reading instruction is more appropriate.

Though this debate became especially heated in the 50's and 60's, it actually had roots in the early 20th century when phonics was taught intensively as part of reading instruction (Baumann et al., 1998; Carbo, 1995; Cunningham, 1994). Many great educators began to ask for a more balanced approach for elementary reading programs, and some began to wonder if phonics should be taught at all. Paul McKee, a significant researcher in reading education during this time period, described the controversy over phonics saying, "the writer knows of no problem

[phonics instruction] around which more disputes have centered” (McKee, 1934, p. 191).

The debate was popularized again in 1967 when Jeanne Chall published a book that shed light on this popular disagreement. Chall (1967) concluded that research showed direct instruction in phonics was necessary in order for children to develop reading fluency and word identification efficiently. In addition, the U.S. Office of Education did a comparison study known as the First Grade Studies, in which beginning reading programs were compared (Bond & Dykstra, 1967). The First Grade Studies seemed to also suggest that systematic phonics instruction was important for producing students who were successful in decoding and fluency; however, there were considerable variations noted in this study, both within and across classrooms (Baumann et al., 1998; Lohnes & Gray, 1972). Due to the conflicting nature of this report, many reading instructors still argued the value of the look-say approach.

The 1980’s brought with it a rise in The Great Debate, as many educators again shifted their views on phonics versus whole language approaches. This was a time period in American history when reading achievement scores were at an all-time low, and critics began to blame the use of whole language instruction for the declining scores (Berliner, 1997). Significant changes in educational policy and practice were proposed or enacted on the basis that “many language arts programs have shifted too far away from direct skills instruction” (California Department of Education, 1987, p. 2).

The International Reading Association (IRA) issued a statement acknowledging how the phonics verses whole language debate had achieved a visible status in education and politics.

Today, the role of phonics in reading and writing has become as much a political issue as it has an educational one. Teachers and schools have become the focus of unprecedented public scrutiny as the controversy over phonics is played out in the media, state

legislatures, school districts, and the home. (IRA, 1997, p. 2)

The IRA called for a more balanced, holistic approach to teaching reading that included aspects of both whole language instruction as well as explicit skills instruction in phonemic awareness and phonics (Baumann et al., 1998; IRA, 1997).

However, the debate has never been fully closed, and it is a debate that still rages in literacy education circles today. The *Read to Be Ready* enterprise took the side of the IRA, and it called for a more integrated approach to the teaching of phonics and whole language instructions. A state-wide coaching network was created to help articulate the message to teachers about the use of appropriate reading instructional practices and to model for teachers the way that literacy blocks can look, using the integrated approach to teaching reading.

Primary grades teachers in Tennessee are still responsible for teaching foundational literacy skills as expressed in the Tennessee Academic Standards. This includes skills like phonemic awareness, phonics, and fluency. As mentioned in TDOE (2017b), data from classroom observations revealed that teachers were spending the majority of their time working with students on these areas. However, with the new *Read to Be Ready* initiative, it was recommended that these skills not be taught in isolation but in conjunction with reading and writing. Toste and Ciullo (2017) asserted that one of the biggest challenges for upper-grades elementary students was a deficit in foundational skills that caused them issues when they were no longer “. . . *learning to read* [but] *reading to learn*” (p. 259).

### **Social Background**

In 2002, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a Literacy Resolution that stated that literacy

is at the heart of basic education for all and that creating literate environments and

societies is essential for achieving the goals of eradicating poverty, reducing child mortality, curbing population growth, achieving gender equity, and ensuring sustainable development, peace, and democracy. (UNGA, 2002, p. 3)

The improvement of literacy has become a global concern, and yet, there are developed nations who still have adult literacy rates as low as 57% (UNESCO, 2017). This lack of literacy proficiency impedes access to opportunities that could be provided by education and workforce development. It also creates an illiterate environment where children within a community are unable to grow up with access to literacy-rich opportunities (UNESCO, 2017).

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an examination given to 15 year-old students in the United States whose results are then compared to the results of 15 year-old students from 72 countries around the world. In 2015, the United States performed only average in reading compared to the other nations, and disadvantaged students were 2.5 times more likely to be low performers in reading than disadvantaged students (OECD, 2015). There has been no significant improvement in the reading performance of American students on the PISA since 2009 (OECD, 2015).

However, the gap in reading proficiency appears to be evident at even earlier ages. As it stands, almost one-third of American students fail to reach reading proficiency by the end of fourth-grade (Varghese, Garwood, Bratsch-Hines, & Vernon-Feagans, 2016), and reading gaps created over time can result in students who are never able to catch up to their peers (McDaniel, McLeod, Carter, & Robinson, 2017). Some research suggested that early interventions by teachers could curb this reading gap and improve student achievement outcomes (Dietrichson, Bog, Filges, & Jorgenson, 2017; Kim & Quinn, 2013) and purported that a “relatively low-dosage intervention” (McDaniel et al., 2017, p. 683) can prevent students from

sustaining cycles of gaps and low performance in reading.

When the gaps in reading were paired down, it appeared that students from minority subgroups or low socioeconomic backgrounds scored significantly lower on reading comprehension exams than did their peers who are not included in a minority subgroup and who came from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2015; Gallagher & Chingos, 2017; Petty, Smith, & Kern, 2017). The bulk of the research suggested that socioeconomic status was the largest contributing factor to early reading deficits (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2014; Heckman, 2006; Heller et al., 2015; Lipsey et al., 2012).

Early reading success is important for social and economic well-being. In 2005, then-senator, Barack Obama, addressed the American Library Association. “Literacy is the most basic currency of the knowledge economy we’re living in today” (Celeste, 2016, p. 10). If this statement is true, then it is crucial that educators get a grasp on how this “currency” can be spent.

TDOE (2016) found that only 8% of the eighth-graders who fell below reading proficiency were deemed college-ready when compared to the college-readiness benchmark of the ACT. This leaves behind too large a percentage of students who will not be ready for postsecondary success. In today’s global society, a high school diploma is no longer sufficient to prepare students for engaging in the modern economy. To suggest that the literacy demands have increased significantly, even since Obama’s 2005 speech, is not an exaggeration. A World Economic Forum (2016) report found that “nearly 50% of subject knowledge acquired during the first year of a four-year technical degree [will be] outdated by the time students graduate” (p. 20). On top of that, the WEF (2016) argued that most school districts across the United States are continuing to train students using a number of

20th century practices that are likely hindering students from making progress that will allow them to be valuable to the future labor market. It is estimated that about 65% of the students who are entering primary schools today will work in jobs and fields that require functions that do not currently exist (WEF, 2016, p. 32).

Early literacy matters (Dipesh & Sanders, 2015; Gischlar & Vesay, 2014; Reutzell, 2015). More and more it is becoming the currency that students will need to provide them with opportunities for economic mobility (Reardon, Valentino, & Shores, 2012). No longer is a high school diploma sufficient for earning a living wage in the United States (Clark & Martorell, 2014). TDOE (2016) stated the reports from the 2012 graduating class showed that those who entered directly into the workforce without pursuing any postsecondary enrollment earned only an average annual salary of \$9,161 in their first year of employment. This amount falls significantly short of the federal government's poverty line for even a household of one, and it is certainly not enough income to support a family. The consequences of this low salary result in deeper economic consequences for all who live in a state, as families who rely on such low wages often have to turn to state-based aid programs to feed and adequately support their families (TDOE, 2016).

In addition, early childhood literacy abilities have been linked to cognitive, behavioral, and emotional health of adults (Dipesh & Sanders, 2015). Children who enter kindergarten with subpar reading skills are at a higher risk of not completing high school, and as adults, they are likely to be among the one in three who have such limited health literacy that they cannot make appropriate health decisions for themselves or their children (Campbell et al., 2014; Dipesh & Sanders, 2015; Larson, Russ, Nelson, Olson, & Halfon, 2015).

## Theoretical Background

After engaging in professional learning opportunities, teachers typically have the freedom to take the ideas and strategies they liked from the sessions and apply them in their general teaching routines. Thus far, research has been mixed concerning the results of teacher professional development on professional practices (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Gaitas & Martins, 2017; Le Fevre, 2014). There appears to be evidence of a link between professional development focusing on content area teaching practices and teachers implementing those practices in the classroom. However, for the classroom practices to change long-term, the PD must be coherent, provide active learning opportunities, engage teachers from the same school in collaborative dialoging, and link to teachers' prior understandings. When there was little evidence that the PD is structured in this way, there was not a link between professional development opportunities and change in teacher practices (Desimone et al., 2002; Knight et al., 2014; Pehmer, Groschner, & Seidel, 2015; Pella, 2015).

To help explain how teachers implement the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices after training, the theory guiding this research is Albert Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory which considers how individuals either acquire or maintain behaviors. It distinguishes between acquisition of knowledge and performance. At this stage in the research, implementation, or decision to act, will be based on the Beecher, Abbot, Peterson, and Greenwood (2017) definition which defined implementation as teachers' delivery of "key procedural features of engaging, evidence-based instruction in a particular content area" (p. 596).

Bandura (1986) proposed that people have a degree of freedom which allows them to either act or not act, and this freedom is defined in terms of the options individuals have as well as their opportunities to exercise those options. Though many people "acquire and

maintain the capabilities to execute” (p. 68) new behaviors, they rarely, or never, use their freedom to perform them (Bandura, 1986). Implementation of new instructional practices will require teachers to utilize their freedom and maintain behaviors that support the process of implementation.

Freedom is a positive term and is associated with the exercise of self-influence. Bandura (1986) wrote that “persons who have the capabilities for exercising many options and are adept at regulating their own behavior” (p. 37) will have greater freedom to pursue those actions, especially when compared to those who have limited means of “personal agency” (p. 37). Bandura (1986) suggested that personal agency has to do with a person’s capability to influence his or her functioning and course of events by his or her own actions. Past experiences, reinforcements, and personal expectations all shape whether people will attempt certain behaviors and will almost always explain why they choose to do so.

Based on his construct of reinforcements, Bandura (1986) suggested that some individuals seek to improve or not improve performance depending on perceived costs and rewards. The higher the perceived reward and the lower the perceived costs, the more likely individuals are to act. Accordingly, highly innovative efforts require “considerable self-disciplined application” (Bandura, 1986, p. 39) in order to sustain the innovation. Because innovation is typically resisted at first, there can be a high perceived cost involved with initiating new behaviors (Bandura, 1986). Those who work through the risks and costs of being ignored or devalued generally do so because they are “sufficiently convinced of the worth of their work” (Bandura, 1986, p. 40). People are more likely to exhibit certain behaviors when they result in “valued outcomes rather than unrewarding or punishing effects” (p. 68).

In addition, environmental factors can influence people's behaviors. Social Cognitive Theory assumes that changes in environment will result in changes in a person's behavior (Bandura, 1986). For this case study, I will be looking across three different elementary schools, within the same district, to determine if changes in environment result in different implementation behaviors. It is possible that aspects of the schools' settings could influence the teachers' abilities to implement *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices with fidelity.

### **Situation to Self**

In the summer of 2017, I had the opportunity to become a Site Director for a *Ready to Be Ready* literacy summer camp that was hosted at the elementary school where I work. As part of the grant funds received for this program, I, along with ten teachers from my elementary school, received extensive training from state literacy coaches on best practices for teaching reading fluency and comprehension. The professional development was done to scale, where school groups were trained together before the camps and able to rehearse the instructional practices in small groups. We spent several days in Nashville learning how to choose appropriate texts to read with students, how to design complex text unit sets, how to employ interactive read-alouds with students, and how to scaffold student learning so that background knowledge and understanding of vocabulary could be increased.

While my group was training to host the camp, I noticed an obvious, renewed joy in the faces of the teachers with whom I was working. There was an air of definite excitement as teachers discussed taking these practices back to the students and their general education classrooms. As a group of colleagues, we experienced a refreshing enthusiasm about tackling early literacy development and trying to make a difference for our students. Throughout the time

of camp, quantitative data was collected and showed immediate positive effects in students' reading fluency and comprehension scores. Because of the quantitative results and the comments teachers were making about how much fun they were having, I fully expected that the *Read to Be Ready* practices would be used in their classrooms when the school year started the following month.

Surprisingly, as I came back to begin my coaching cycles for the 2017-2018 school year, I observed those same teachers who had employed the *Read to Be Ready* practices at summer camp with ease and enthusiasm, revert back to their normal way of teaching reading. I had assumed that because they enjoyed the new approach and had seen such growth with it, that they would apply the instructional routines to their general classroom practices. That is how the idea for this study developed. I began to wonder what are the challenges and successes that teachers face when trying to implement proven instructional practices or what might prevent them from transferring their learning from one environment to another.

For this study, I will act as a nonparticipant observer (Creswell, 2013). Nonparticipation observations can be used in conjunction with other data collection methods and can offer a more nuanced appreciation of the situation (Liu & Maitlis, 2010), which may not be easily captured through other methods. As a nonparticipant observer, I will enter the environment but stay separate from the activities that are being observed. I plan to start with a descriptive observation to overview the setting, move to a focused observation that will pay attention to a narrower portion of the lesson that interests me, and then move to selected observation in which I will look for relationships among all the elements I have seen (Liu & Maitlis, 2010). One potential issue with this role is that the presence of the researcher could influence a participant's actions (Liu & Maitlis, 2010).

The research paradigm that I hold is constructivism, as I recognize that multiple realities will need to be explored to fully describe the case (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This case consists of 12 elementary teachers from southeast Tennessee who are implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in their general literacy instruction. The realities of all 12 participants will need to be examined and described at the end of this study. Elkind (2005) said that constructivism was “the recognition that reality is a product of human intelligence interacting with experience in the real world” (p. 334). By nature of my constructivist paradigm, this research will be interpretive, meaning that any findings or knowledge claims from this study will rely on my interpretation (Schwandt, 2001). As the researcher, I am positioned within the context of this study, and my personal values may influence the results. However, I wish to rely as much as possible on the participants’ view of their situations (Creswell, 2013). Descriptions of the case will be constructed through the broad interactions and discussions participants have with the researcher that occur as a result of this study.

From an ontological standpoint, I believe reality can only be reported on when multiple realities have been embraced. It is my intent to report on the multiple realities lived by my 12 participants, using their actual words and presenting their different perspectives on the implementation process. In terms of epistemology, I designed this case study so that I could “get as close as possible to the participants being studied” (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). Data will be collected in the field where the participants are actually working, so that context is provided to support what the participants are saying or doing. Axiologically, I find reading instruction to be one of the most valuable components of early childhood education. My familiarity with the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices and my belief that they are vital in early literacy instruction may color the interpretation of the findings. When necessary, I have sought to

disclose my personal biases that could have potential impact on my research. Concerning methodology, I will use inductive logic, studying the implementation of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices within its context. Questions will continue to be revised as experiences in the field emerge, and I will work with the particular details from the field to create a full description of the case.

### **Problem Statement**

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) assessment revealed that only 36% of fourth-grade students nationwide scored at or above proficiency levels in reading. In the state of Tennessee, 33% of Tennessee fourth-graders scored proficient in reading based on end of the year standardized testing (The Nation's Report Card, 2017). Classroom observations that took place in over 150 classrooms across the state revealed primary grades literacy teachers were spending instructional time emphasizing skills-based activities rather than knowledge-based competencies (TDOE, 2016). An isolated mastery of literacy skills is not sufficient to produce readers who can appropriately comprehend, and teaching these skills in isolation could lead to long-term gaps in student learning (Bock & Erickson, 2015; Fountas & Pinnell, 2017). In addition, students from low income homes or from minority subgroups may already have reading deficits due to lack of language and vocabulary exposure in the home (Caputo & Estrovitz, 2017; Christodoulou et al., 2017; Stairs-Davenport & Chenard, 2016;). While several peer-reviewed studies showed the integrated approach to literacy was the best approach to use in the classroom, and data was available to show the integrated approach to literacy has been used successfully at over 200 summer *Read to Be Ready* literacy camp sites across Tennessee, there is little research to suggest that these practices are taken back to the classroom and used (TDOE, 2017a). The problem is that there is not a clear

understanding of teachers' *Read to Be Ready* implementation experiences and how that affects their early literacy instructional practices. No studies provide an in-depth explanation of the experiences teachers who were trained to use the integrated approach at the summer literacy camps have when working to implement this approach in their regular classroom instruction.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this embedded case study is to describe the experiences of 12 elementary teachers who are implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in their classrooms in southeast Tennessee, after having used them at a summer literacy camp. Implementation will be defined as teachers' delivery of "key procedural features of engaging, evidence-based instruction in a particular content area" (Beecher, Abbott, Petersen, & Greenwood, 2017, p. 596). For this study, the content area of concern is early literacy.

The overarching theory guiding this study is Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory as it explains motivation and what wills people to try new behaviors. Behaviors are often repeated or not repeated depending on the reinforcements involved. Based on the construct of reinforcements, Bandura (1986) suggested that some individuals seek to improve or not improve performance depending on perceived costs and rewards. The higher the perceived reward and the lower the perceived costs, the more likely individuals are to act. Individuals also tend to learn more complex skills from observation (Bandura, 1986), and working environment could be a contributing factor to how people are able or unable to learn and apply new skills.

### **Significance of the Study**

There are many studies available which explore best practices for early literacy development and bridging the reading gap for low-income learners (Christodoulou et al., 2017; Fountas & Pinnell, 2017; Grabe & Stoller, 2011; McClure & Fullerton, 2017; Pollard-Durodola

et al., 2015; White, Kim, Kingston, & Foster, 2014; Wiseman, 2011; Zvoch & Stevens, 2015). In fact, these studies encouraged Tennessee education leaders to promote early literacy in a more aggressive way through the state's *Read to Be Ready* literacy initiative. Yet, while the TDOE had spent millions of dollars to train elementary grades teachers on best practices in reading through the *Read to Be Ready* initiative, no research had been done to see what the implementation process had been like for teachers. This information could be of use to policy makers, school boards, and legislatures who decide how educational tax dollars should best be spent.

This study is guided by Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory. Understanding teachers' pedagogical and content knowledge across the domains of early literacy development and how to bring those dynamic, complex components together in the context of an authentic classroom could help elementary grades teachers better understand how to design literacy lessons for early readers. Examining implementation challenges through the lens of Bandura's (1986) construct of reinforcements could help identify areas of teacher resistance and help school leaders understand how to better introduce reforms or initiatives. This study can help administrators design professional development opportunities that address implementation challenges of new initiatives, which may allow the learning to become more transferable to teachers' professional practices. It may also help literacy coaches re-direct their training with teachers to ensure the possibility of professional development transfer and ownership in the area of early literacy development.

Overall, this research will continue to fill in the gap in the literature pertaining to the use of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices, particularly in terms of phonics versus whole language reading education. There are limitations to the generalization of this study to a broader

audience, especially to schools outside of Tennessee where *Read to Be Ready* practices are not being promoted. However, this case study is relevant to early grades literacy teachers who are interested in research-based practices. This study is immediately relevant to literacy coaches who may be concerned about factors that affect implementation of reading instructional practices. The data will provide not only the rationale behind why there needs to be a balanced approach to reading instruction, but also how teachers experience the process of implementing one. Due to the concerns over low literacy rates in the United States (Celeste, 2016; WEF, 2016), the findings from this research are also relevant to a variety of other educational stakeholders. For instance, community organizations, like pediatric doctors' offices, may be interested in partnering with schools to see how they can better support the process of promoting early childhood literacy.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions will address the central focus of this study, and they were designed to address the gap in the literature concerning the implementation of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices. These questions were constructed using the lens of Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory. Each question will allow for a thorough investigation of the case and will help create a rich description of the problem. The initial question is the one driving the interest of the study and is followed by four sub-questions.

#### **Central Research Question**

What are the experiences teachers have when implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in their general classroom settings?

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that a qualitative researcher's overarching central question is found by asking the broadest question that could be posed when trying to address the

research problem. Question one aims to describe the *Read to Be Ready* implementation experiences teachers in a specific site have had. This question will aid in developing themes that represent the responses of individuals within the site.

Furthermore, Kim et al., (2017) wrote that “bringing research-based programs to scale remains one of the most vexing challenges in the literacy research community” (p. 443).

Although best practices in literacy instruction have been identified in many studies (Bryk, Gomez, Grunow, & LeMahieu, 2015; Kim et al., 2017), there is still much to learn about how to implement these instructional practices across a variety of contexts. Understanding participants’ experiences with implementation of *Read to Be Ready* practices could help identify areas of teacher need that will increase instructional practice effectiveness.

### **Subquestion 1**

What are the supports teachers identify as necessary in the implementation process?

The purpose of the subquestions is to allow the researcher to further specify the central question into smaller components of inquiry (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For subquestion one, its purpose is to determine if participants can name for themselves some of the supports they feel are necessary for helping them better implement *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices.

Recent studies suggested that despite having identified program design elements that should maximize teacher learning and implementation of professional development, most districts found a generally weak return for the amount of district dollars they have invested in teacher professional development (Harris & Sass, 2011; Hill, Beisiegel, & Jacob, 2013; Jacob & Lefgren, 2004). Because implementation of best practices could relate to teacher learning and development, it is necessary that participants identify areas of support needed to help them practice their professional learning.

### **Subquestion 2**

What school specific environmental factors influence teachers' choices regarding the implementation of the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices?

Subquestion two is meant to help identify any school specific characteristics that could influence implementation. At this time, few studies have examined the way that organizational aspects influence teacher implementation behaviors (Allen & Penuel, 2014). Environment is one of the main considerations in SCT, and Bandura (1986) posited that environment factors into whether or not a person will engage in a behavior as well as determines why they choose to do so or not. Individuals' abilities to make sense of changes in instructional practices could be shaped by their immediate school environment (Coburn, 2004). In addition, school environment has been reported to have an effect on teachers' classroom practices (Allen & Penuel, 2014; Coburn & Russell, 2008; Penuel, Frank, & Krause, 2011; Penuel, Sun, Frank, & Gallagher, 2013).

### **Subquestion 3**

What are the perceived costs, relative to time, cognitive demands, and physical demands of implementing the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices?

The purpose of subquestion three is to determine what teachers perceive as costs, or negative reinforcements (Bandura, 1986), to implementing the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in their classrooms. In recent years, teachers have shown increasingly negative attitudes towards school reform movements (Jacobs, Boardman, Potvin, & Wang, 2017; Maier, 2010; Mutch, 2012; Ramirez, 2018; Terhart, 2013) and what Terhart (2013) called "education managerialism" (p. 486). These negative attitudes have likely contributed to teachers' resistance to implement instructional practices or initiatives that are being promoted at state and district levels. *Read to Be Ready* is one such state initiative.

#### **Subquestion 4**

What are the perceived benefits of implementing the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices?

Bandura (1986) suggested that the principal means of behavior change comes from mastery experiences that provide a sense of benefit. Concerning the change in teachers' behaviors, there is a noted gap between education research findings and actual teacher practice (Grima-Farrell, 2014; Nasreen & Muhammad, 2014; Nijhawan, 2017; Procter, 2015; van Ingen, McHatton, & Vomvoridi-Ivanovic, 2015). In fact, teachers' personal experiences have been found to have a bigger impact on implementation of practices than research (Levin, Cooper, Mascarenhas, & Thompson, 2010; Procter, 2015). Koch (2011) found that teachers had positive reactions to state-mandated instructional practices when teachers had positive experiences related to using the practices and when the teachers felt that the practices were useful to them. There is a possibility that understanding teachers' perceptions of benefits that come with the implementation of instructional practices can improve the development of teacher PD and help create stronger teacher buy-in for using research-based practices (Dail, Goodsite, & Sanders, 2018; Hill, 2009; Meissel, Parr, & Timperley, 2016).

#### **Definitions**

1. *Equity* – equal and fair access to educational opportunities despite personal and social circumstances; the ability to provide a “basic minimum standard of education for all” (OECD, 2008, para. 7).
2. *Implementation* – teachers' delivery of “key procedural features of engaging, evidence-based instruction in a particular content area” (Beecher, Abbott, Petersen, & Greenwood, 2017, p. 596).

3. *Instructional practices* – actions and activities that teachers can be observed to do (Koschmann, 2011).
4. *Literacy* – a set of tangible skills; particularly the cognitive skills of reading and writing which allows people to use printed and written information in order to function in society (UNESCO, 2006; White & McCloskey, 2003).
5. *Ownership* – related to a teacher’s professional identity and understood as a teacher’s mental or psychological state of feeling as the owner of an innovation; typically developed when a teacher puts mental and physical effort into an innovation and assumes a successful integration of the innovation into working routines (Bergen & Van Veen, 2004; Breiting, 2008; Ketelaar, Beijaard, den Brok, & Boshuizen, 2013).
6. *Personal agency* – a person’s capability to influence his or her functioning and course of events by his or her own actions (Bandura, 1986).
7. *Professional development* – supports and activities like courses, trainings, coaching, and/or research that are designed to help teachers grow in their professional competence (Coldwell, 2017).
8. *Reading proficiency* – the ability to draw meaning from the printed page and interpret this information through fluent reading, interactive processing, effective use of strategies, purposeful engagement, and application of linguistics (Grabe & Stoller, 2011).
9. *Read to Be Ready* – an initiative developed by Tennessee Governor, Bill Haslam, and Tennessee Commissioner of Education, Candice McQueen, where K-2 literacy teachers are professionally developed in early reading instructional practices that provide students with a balanced, integrated approach to reading (TDOE, 2016).

10. *Reinforcement* – internal or external responses that affect the likelihood that a person will continue or eliminate a certain behavior. This construct of the Social Cognitive Theory has the strongest link to the relationship that exists between a person’s behavior and his or her environment (Bandura, 1986).
11. *Social Cognitive Theory* – originally a theory on learning, Social Cognitive Theory was developed by Albert Bandura to explain how people acquire and maintain behavior, while also considering the social environment in which that behavior takes place (Bandura, 1986).
12. *Symbolizing capability* – a term from SCT that explains how people use past experiences to guide their future action (Bandura, 1986).
13. *Transfer* – a transformational process in which teachers incorporate ideas from professional learning to “improve teacher practice [and] to improve student outcomes” (McDonald, 2014, p. 1571).
14. *Vicarious capability* – a term from SCT that describes how learning can occur vicariously by observing other people’s behaviors (Bandura, 1986).

### **Summary**

Literacy development is a critical issue in American schools (Copeland & Martin, 2016). Almost one-third of students fail to reach reading proficiency by the end of fourth-grade, and “two out of every three students in the U.S. do not have the necessary reading proficiencies to successfully complete grade level work” (Allington, 2011, p. 40; Varghese et al., 2016). Those students who do not reach reading proficiency by the end of third grade are less likely than their peers who do read at proficient levels to find economic or social success (TDOE, 2016).

Students from minority backgrounds and from economically disadvantaged homes showed the greatest need for reading interventions (Copeland & Martin, 2016; Stairs-Davenport & Chenard, 2016; White et al., 2014). Unfortunately, elementary students from low-income homes experience summer learning loss to a greater degree than their high-income peers (Copeland & Martin, 2016). This three-month gap (White et al., 2014) is attributed to lack of exposure to books in the home and to lack of quality summer experiences such as adult-child interactions which build vocabulary and background knowledge.

While several peer-reviewed studies show the integrated approach to literacy is the best approach to use for addressing literacy gaps, and data is available to show the integrated approach to literacy has been used successfully at over 200 summer *Read to Be Ready* literacy camp sites across Tennessee, there is little research to suggest that these practices are taken back to the classroom and used (TDOE, 2017a). The problem is that there is not a clear understanding of teachers' *Read to Be Ready* implementation experiences and how that affects their early literacy instructional practices. The purpose of this embedded case study is to describe the experiences of 12 elementary teachers who are implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in their classrooms in southeast Tennessee, after having used them at a summer literacy camp.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

The purpose of this embedded case study is to describe the implementation process of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices for 12 elementary grades teachers in southeast Tennessee. Albert Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory is the theoretical framework that will guide this study. This chapter will include an explanation of Social Cognitive Theory as well as a review of related literature pertaining to low literacy rates across the United States, summer reading loss for students, current trends and practices in early literacy instruction, evidence-based practices for teaching emergent readers, and background information on the design of *Read to Be Ready* and its framework. The related literature will provide a backdrop in which to situate the overall research design and methodology that was utilized in this case study.

### Theoretical Framework

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) came from Albert Bandura's work in the 1960's on how people learn. It was originally called Social Learning Theory, but he changed the name in 1986 because the theory was taking on a more holistic view of how cognition plays a part in human learning (Grusec, 1992). SCT presents a theoretical framework for analyzing human behaviors, actions, thoughts, and motivations from a social cognitive perspective. One of the main tenants of SCT is that the environment, personal factors, and behavior all interact and create cause. However, people have the opportunity to exercise control over their lives because of the power of their self-regulatory and self-reflective thought processes (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1986) explained, "Human thought is a powerful instrument for comprehending the environment and dealing with it" (p. xi).

Teachers in primary schools have to update their knowledge and skills continuously (Beier, Teachout, & Cox, 2012; Van der Heijden, Van Vuuren, Kooij, & de Lange., 2015). As a result, teacher professional development plays an important role in sustaining and improving teachers' practices (Evers, Kreijns, Van der Heijden, & Gerrichhauzen, 2011; Van der Heijden et al., 2015). SCT proposed that one of the most significant ways people obtain genuine learning is through the observation of others (Bandura, 1986). Bandura (1986) purported that observational learning is important because without it, people would have to learn through trial and error, which could make mistakes costly. Consider teaching a teenager how to drive or a child how to swim – the consequences of their potential failures is too hazardous. Instead, there are many complex skills which must be mastered through observational learning. Bandura (1986) labeled this “vicarious capability” (p. 19), which is a term that describes how learning can occur vicariously by observing other people's behavior.

Often, teaching can feel like an isolated profession (Gonzalez, 2013) where teachers could feel alienated, disengaged from work, and separated from seeing best practices in action (Stone-Johnson, 2015). The National Institute for Literacy (2009) report suggested that teachers are continuing to use outdated instructional practices in primary grades reading, and the lack of opportunities for social observation in the profession could lead to difficulty implementing new practices.

Bandura (1986) also considered the impact of “symbolizing capability” (p. 18) on people's behavior. Symbolizing capability explains how people use past experiences to guide their future action. By drawing on this knowledge, people can either “generate innovative courses of action” (p. 18) or fail to consider the consequences of different choices (Bandura,

1986). Even if people know how to reason logically, they can make faulty judgements when they base their behavior on inferences or inadequate information.

The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP) (2008) report analyzed data on early literacy development across America. Conclusions from this report are important because people in the education business take their cues from this research. Publishers will print curriculum based on this report, states and districts will align tests to emphasize the standards most identified in the report, and teachers will focus their teaching on the standards most likely to be tested (Paris & Luo, 2010). Paris and Luo (2010) wrote that the NELP (2008) report may have some confounding statistical analyses that led readers of the report to infer that decoding skills were the best predictors of long-term reading achievement and the most important areas to focus on for early reading interventions.

One of the factors that influences research on reading is the preponderance of evidence that is available to support those in favor of promoting decoding as the best interventions for early literacy development. Because assessments of decoding skills are widely available and because decoding is a skill that is easier to measure and quantify, “there are many more published studies that meet the criteria of review panels such as the National Reading Panel and NELP” (Paris & Luo, 2010, pp. 316-317). Over time, these studies may have contributed to educators’ use of pedagogy that overemphasized decoding skills at the expense of skills such as vocabulary, comprehension, writing, and ability to critically evaluate literature (Paris & Luo, 2010).

Reinforcements, as related to SCT, are positive or negative events that increase and reduce the likelihood of repeating behaviors (Bandura, 1986, p. 237). Bandura (1986) suggested that signs of progress are positive reinforcements that affect motivation. Whether or not a given

level of progress will provide personal satisfaction depends upon one's internal standard. The same sign of progress could arouse disappointment if measured against a standard not so easily reached. Feedback about progress is what helps people set goals for future performance, providing a continuing source of self-motivation (Bandura, 1986; Cummings, Schwab, & Rosen, 1971). "Skilled and creative endeavors" (Bandura, 1986, p. 240) depend heavily on this form of personal incentive which rewards personal efficacy. People are more willing to enlist time and energy to taxing activities that bring them self-satisfaction. When the costs for participating in these activities are no longer fulfilling, people are more likely to discontinue the grueling efforts (Bandura, 1986).

The growing emphasis from legislatures and school boards to hold teachers accountable for the implementation of evidence-based practices has resulted in an escalated amount of pressure on teachers that has been compounded by the additional stresses of the profession (Cook et al., 2016; Fleming, Mackrain, & LeBuffe, 2013; Gu & Day, 2013; Shahjahan, 2011). Unsurprisingly, high levels of stress and lack of satisfaction from the job have been linked to unsuccessful behavior change efforts and poor fidelity of implementation for evidence-based practices (Cook et al., 2016; Forman et al., 2013; Gu & Day, 2013). There has also been recent research which suggested teachers' job satisfaction is directly related to student outcomes (Biglan, Layton, Jones, Hankins, & Rusby, 2011; Cook et al., 2016; Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013). Understanding reinforcements that provide teachers with personal efficacy and job satisfaction could contribute to their willingness to implement innovative practices.

### **Related Literature**

A review of the related literature will provide background information on illiteracy across

the United States and how illiteracy can negatively impact social and economic welfare. The review of the related literature will also detail how specific subgroups appear to have wider gaps in their reading proficiency and explain how these gaps in learning affect student achievement outcomes. Because some of these reading gaps are caused by a phenomenon known as summer slide, this section will define summer slide and show how it connects to reading loss. In addition, it will provide some solutions for summer slide and detail how the state of Tennessee has enacted *Read to Be Ready* summer literacy camps in order to address summer slide.

The review of the related literature will outline research-based instructional practices for boosting early literacy development. Those same research-based instructional practices, which are found in the *Read to Be Ready* framework will be explained. The studies that suggest the promotion of these practices will be highlighted and analyzed, and the four main components of the *Read to Be Ready* reading framework will be individually reviewed.

### **Low Reading Proficiency in the United States**

The inability to read makes life significantly harder for individuals and also impacts society at large (Klassen, Tze, & Hannok, 2013; Rasmussen, 2017; Stack-Cutler, Parrila, & Torppa, 2015; Strauss, 2016). For those unable to read, there is limited access to information, employment, and lifelong learning opportunities (Copeland & Martin, 2016; Hayes, 2017; Smart et al., 2017). In addition, adults who are unable to read often give little value to education, which could lead to an intergenerational transmission of illiteracy (Permanyer, Garcia, & Esteve, 2013; Strauss, 2016). Children of parents with low literacy skills have a 72% chance of being at the lowest reading level themselves (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2018).

Unfortunately, there appears to be a literacy problem in the United States (Allington, 2011; Copeland & Martin, 2016; NAEP, 2017). Approximately 32 million adults in the United

States cannot read (U.S. Department of Education, 2014), and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2015) found that 50% of U.S. adults cannot read a book that is written on an eighth-grade level.

Research shows a clear correlation between low literacy rates and poverty (Benson & Borman, 2010; Hayes 2017; Strauss, 2016), which affects social life at all levels. Of adults with the lowest literacy levels, 43% live in poverty, and 70% of adult welfare recipients have low literacy levels (National Assessment of Adult Literacy, 2013). People at the lowest literacy levels have higher rates of unemployment and earn lower wages than the national average (Miller, Greenburg, Hendrick, & Nanda, 2017; Smart et al., 2017; Strauss, 2016). This cost of low literacy in the U.S. is about \$225 billion each year due to non-productivity in the workforce, crime, and loss of tax revenue due to unemployment (National Council for Adult Learning, 2008).

Adult illiteracy is often associated with deficits in early childhood literacy development (Abdazi, 2012; Barakat, 2016; De Grauwe et al., 2015; Post, 2016). The most critical period for children's development and learning is from birth through age five, and most research supports the suggestion that children who are not on reading grade level by the fourth grade will never reach reading proficiency (Bigozzi, Tarchi, Vagnoli, Valente, & Pinto, 2017; Guthrie, 2015; Hernandez, 2011; NAEP, 2017; Rasinski et al., 2017). In the United States, only 36% of fourth graders are reading at proficient or advanced levels (NAEP, 2017). In the state of Tennessee, only 33% of fourth graders are reading at proficient or advanced levels (TDOE, 2016). While these struggling readers account for only about one-third of students, they ultimately represent three-fifths of the students who drop out of school or who fail to graduate on time (Hernandez, 2011).

In a joint report written by the IRA and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2009), one of the best predictors of whether a child will have success in school and go on to contribute as a productive member of society, is that child's level of progress made in reading and writing during the early years. The development of early skills appears to be particularly important in the area of literacy (National Institute for Literacy, 2009). Early literacy development has been correlated with risks of dropping out, not graduating on time, and living in poverty (Hayes, 2017; Hernandez, 2011). Therefore, emergent literacy instruction should be one of the most important carefully considered components of primary grades teaching.

### **Diversity in Reading Scores Among Subgroups**

Schools across the U.S. are looking for intentional and focused approaches to remediate students' reading in innovative ways that seek to equip students with the necessary skills in literacy to access economic mobility and social capital by creating learning experiences that account for the lack of contextual framing for low-income and minority subgroups (Shelton-Ormond, 2017; Wallace, 2016). Noguera (2011) wrote that making "bold assertions that all children can achieve while doing nothing to address the outside-of-school challenges they face is neither fair nor a sound basis for developing public policy" (p. 10). Acknowledging these challenges and aligning policy positions that look at systematic investments in teaching practices that change the odds for people living with poverty and economic insecurity, rather than helping them overcome the odds can help educators on their path to reading instruction reform (Noguera, 2011; Shelton-Ormond, 2017).

The rising generation of American public school children is increasingly diverse, and students from minority subgroups are showing significant discrepancies in their literacy

achievement (Center on Educational Policy, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; Solari, Petscher, & Folsom, 2012). The U.S. Department of Education (2017) estimated that one-fifth of the school age population do not speak English as their native language. These students are typically identified by schools as English language learners (ELL), and according to the Center on Educational Policy (2009), the reading performance gap between ELL and non-ELL students was significant and persistent nationwide. Even when enrolled in elementary school from early elementary, only 7% of fourth graders and 3% of eighth graders were scoring at or above proficiency on reading assessments, as compared to 36% and 34% of native English speakers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

The fastest growing population of ELL students speak Spanish, and accounted for 77% of schools' ELL groups (Solari et al., 2012). Statistics from the PEW Research Center (2014) indicated that in the state of Tennessee, 8% of the current student population in grades K-12 identify as Hispanic. To put that in perspective, that percentage is indicative of over 85,000 students who are sitting in classrooms across Tennessee. NAEP (2017) reported only 27% of Tennessee students who were classified as Hispanic in grade four, scored at or above proficiency on reading measures. These scores indicated that there is still a wide gap between White and Hispanic students' reading achievement.

However, in Tennessee, students who identified as Hispanic scored higher on NAEP assessments than did their African American peers. Only 9% of fourth graders who identified as African American scored at or above proficiency levels in reading. Though nationally, the average proficiency rate for African Americans was higher at 18% (NAEP, 2017), there still remains a significant gap in reading achievement levels for African American students when compared to their White peers.

Students with disabilities are another subgroup who tend to trail their peers nationally when it comes to literacy achievement. Across the United States, only 12% of students with disabilities scored at proficient or advanced levels on reading achievement measures (NAEP, 2017). In fact, NAEP (2017) reported that there has been little, if any, improvement in reading scores for students with disabilities over the last five administrations of the test. As a subgroup, students with disabilities are already at an increased risk for underperformance in reading due to the likely presence of a specific learning disability (Stevenson, Reed, & Tighe, 2016). Students with specific learning disabilities represented the largest portion of students who receive special education services in the U.S., and more than 80% qualified with a specific learning disability in reading (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; Stevenson et al., 2016).

### **Challenges of Summer Slide**

While many students enjoy the sweet freedom offered by summer vacation, there are a number of other students who are harmed academically by this release from school (Allyn & Morrell, 2016; McDaniel et al., 2017; Petty et al., 2017; Zvoch & Stevens, 2015). Summer vacation often leads to the loss of critical reading skills, especially for disadvantaged students whom lack the necessary reading and literacy resources. This unfortunate decline in skills is often termed summer slide or summer loss (Allyn & Morrell, 2016; Christodoulou et al., 2017; Petty et al., 2017).

Summer slide is a phenomenon that sometimes occurs during the months of summer vacation when students are not reading or engaging with books (Allyn & Morrell, 2016). This lack of reading consistency can result in students remaining static in their reading progress, or even losing ground on their current capabilities (McDaniel et al., 2017; Petty et al., 2017). All children experience summer learning loss to a degree, but students in poverty or from minority

backgrounds, tend to experience it to a much greater degree (Copeland & Martin, 2016).

McDaniel et al., (2017) used the analogy of a faucet to explain the phenomenon of summer slide, also known as summer reading loss. For most economically disadvantaged students, school is the vehicle in which resources and opportunities flow, and when the summer months come, that input or flow is shut off for them. However, their peers who live in upper income homes still have this flow of educational development that comes from “enrichment activities, literacy exposure, and other opportunities provided by family and community” (McDaniel et al., 2017, p. 674).

Theoretically, students’ summer learning gaps could widen summer after summer, leaving them with critical deficits in learning over time. In a landmark study, Allington and McGill-Franzen (2015) discovered that summer slide accounted for as much as 85% of the reading achievement gap between lower-income students and their middle and upper-income peers. Even when school starts back, the students from disadvantaged groups remain behind their peers due to the weeks of re-teaching needed to catch students up (Allington & McGill-Franzen, 2015; McDaniel et al., 2017; Petty et al., 2017; Stairs-Davenport & Chenard, 2016). While the students who suffered from summer slide are having to relearn foundational literacy skills, their peers are moving forward, creating an even wider learning gap between the two groups. This gap in learning is estimated to be about a three-month learning gap (Caputo & Estrovitz, 2017; White et al., 2014), and by the time struggling readers reach middle school, summer slide has amounted to about a two-year gap in reading achievement (Allyn, 2013; White et al., 2014).

### **Summer Slide and Read to Be Ready**

However, summer slide is a phenomenon that is considered solvable (Allyn & Morrell, 2016). Building and shaping a strong reading life during summer vacation months can play a significant role in giving every child a chance to succeed in reading. McDaniel et al., (2017) reported that a “relatively low-dosage intervention” (p. 683) was sufficient for preventing summer slide. Unfortunately, most schools are unable to provide summer reading programs due to the costs associated with them (Christodoulou et al., 2017). Some communities have addressed this issue by offering summer reading programs through their public libraries or youth community centers, like the YMCA (Christodoulou et al., 2017; McDaniel et al., 2017; Zvoch & Stevens, 2015).

The state of Tennessee’s *Read to Be Ready* initiative addresses the summer slide phenomenon by creating a summer reading program, at schools across the state, that are to be implemented in the fashion of a summer camp. The Dollar General Literacy Foundation gave \$1 million to the Tennessee Department of Education as a means of funding a summer grant program for three years. In addition to the Dollar General funds, the Tennessee Department of Economic and Community Development and the Tennessee Department of Human Services provided funding to help ensure the summer grant program was able to be created (Gonzales, 2017; TDOE, 2017b). This idea to hold summer camps in schools across the state was a way to strategically support the new literacy efforts by providing rich instructional programs in early literacy for rising first, second, or third graders at school sites where grant requirements were met.

Originally, there were two goals for the program: (a) ensure that students who are likely to be most impacted by summer slide receive opportunities and support for growth in essential

reading skills and (b) engage students in “deep dives into text” (TDOE, 2017b, p. 19) that will nurture and build their love for reading (Armstrong, 2018). It was important that this camp not be boring for students either. In order to truly grow students’ love of literacy and increase motivation for reading, the goal was for this camp to be fun and engaging. Camp instructors were encouraged to use “high-interest books, authentic literacy experiences, and engaging field trips” (TDOE, 2017a, p. 2).

The first generation of summer literacy camps funded by the new grant money were held across Tennessee school districts in the summer of 2016. In the first year, twenty school sites hosted the literacy-based summer camps (Tatter, 2017). The money that was provided through the grants allowed for 140 teachers to receive specialized training on best practices in early literacy. Also, 11,700 books were sent home with students to keep as part of their personal home library (TDOE, 2017a).

Due to the successes documented from the first round of the grant program, the Tennessee Department of Human Services offered to invest \$30 million over the course of three years to enhance and expand the program (Gonzales, 2017; Tatter, 2017; TDOE, 2017a). This allowed for a 1,200% increase in the number of students who would be able to be served through the summer camps from year one to year two. After two years of camp services being provided, over 8,000 students have been served at 200 total camp sites. In addition, 73% of Tennessee school districts have participated so far, and almost all of the economically distressed school districts had camp sites open. As well, the data report that over 1,800 teachers have now been trained to lead summer literacy camps, which is an increase of 435% since 2016 (TDOE, 2017a).

The camps are designed so that students attend at least four weeks out of the summer, at least four hours per day. This provides students at least 80 hours of intense literacy instruction

and enrichment during their summer. Additionally, the grant requirements mandated that teacher to student ratios remain small (TDOE, 2017a). There must be one teacher for every five students who participate. This allows for relationship-building opportunities and teacher-student partnerships to be created so that intense literacy development can occur (Bowne et al., 2017; Bussert-Webb & Zhang, 2015; Ross & Begeny, 2015).

Since the camps do not have to follow the structure of a typical school day, there is leniency in the design of the program. Camp directors are expected to provide rich literacy instruction and experiences, but traditional methods are not required. This flexibility helps in creating student engagement and building motivation. It also helps teachers introduce new concepts and develop critical thinking skills as students explore topics and expand their background knowledge to include these new experiences (TDOE, 2017a). Teachers are encouraged to challenge and motivate their students while allowing students the opportunity to self-select texts or topics they want to know more about. Across the state, this flexible design resulted in 184,977 hours of student reading, 59, 132 hours of student writing, and 64, 309 hours of involvement in enrichment activities (TDOE, 2017a).

The cornerstone of the *Read to Be Ready* summer camp was its ability to promote genuine equity (Choi, Meisenheimer, McCart, & Sailor, 2016; TDOE, 2017a). Students who grow up in low-income homes normally do not have exposure to activities that help them build a sophisticated knowledge of the world around them. Some of these activities include taking family vacations or engaging in enriching activities outside of the home. A portion of *Read to Be Ready* summer camp grant funding was set aside for teachers to take students on field trips. The field trip designations were set up to match the theme of books being read, so that students could think broadly about a variety of topics and experiences. Every camp participant was given

access to high-quality, authentic texts (TDOE, 2017a), which was part of grant funding requirements. Each child had to be sent home with at least six new books to keep in their personal libraries. Amazingly, over 180,000 high-quality books were sent home with Tennessee students, which averaged to each child receiving about 22 new books for his or her home library (TDOE, 2017a). This access to texts that would allow students to continue practicing reading and to help foster their love of reading was cited as a major success of the camps (Frey & Fisher, 2013; Hill, 2017; TDOE, 2017a; Vick, 2016).

### **Current Trends and Practices in Early Literacy Instruction**

The NAEYC (2009), issued a statement which suggested that among the major issues in early literacy education, there are two which seem to contribute significantly to low literacy rates of children in the United States: (a) inappropriate instructional practices being used in the literacy acquisition process; and (b) preschool and primary teachers being under-qualified to support the literacy development of all children.

Teaching practices associated with outdated views of literacy development are still prevalent in many classrooms (Bock & Erickson, 2015; Botzakis, Burns, & Hall, 2014; Krause, 2013; Toste & Ciullo, 2017). Some of these practices include extensive whole-group instruction and intensive drill and practice on isolated skills. These practices are not especially effective for primary-grade children, and they are even less appropriate and effective for preschool and kindergarten children (Chen, Cheng, & Chuo, 2016; TDOE, 2016; Walker-Gleaves, & Waugh, 2017). Young children benefit from being engaged in experiences that make academic content meaningful and build on prior learning. It is vital for all children to have literacy experiences in schools and early childhood programs (Allington, 2014; Knapp, 1995). Such access is even more critical for children with limited home experiences (Torgeson &

Hudson, 2006). However, these school experiences must teach the broad range of language and literacy knowledge and skills to provide the solid foundation on which high levels of reading depend (Bock & Erickson, 2015; Deeney, 2016; Grabe & Stoller, 2011).

Currently in the U.S. there are no standard preparation requirements or licensure standards that exist for teachers of children younger than kindergarten age (Kvatum, 2017). In fact, many preschool workers only have to hold a high school diploma in order to be considered for employment. On top of that, salaries in child care and preschool programs are often too low to attract or retain better qualified staff (Kvatum, 2017; Miller, 2017). Even in the primary grades, where certified teachers are required, many states do not offer specialized early childhood certification. Because there is no additional certification required, many teachers are not adequately prepared to teach reading and writing to young children (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2016). For teachers wishing to pursue professional development in the area of literacy, insufficient resources are often cited as a barrier to receiving these opportunities (Donelan, 2016; Hill, Beisiegel, & Jacob, 2013; Sleeter, 2014).

In recent years, teacher complaints about their undergraduate preparation programs have increased, particularly in regards to preparation for teaching reading (Barends & Nel, 2017; Grisham et al., 2014; Leech, Haug, & Nimer, 2015; Kavanagh & Rainey, 2017; Wallace, 2016; Meeks, Stephenson, Kemp, & Madelaine, 2017). “Our universities do not teach teachers how to teach reading at the undergraduate level; [new teachers] are coming through a traditional track not knowing how to teach reading, just the overall basic components of it” (Wallace, 2016, para. 3). With the introduction of more rigorous reading standards through the Common Core State Standards, many educators felt unprepared to teach students how to genuinely engage with even more complex texts (TDOE, 2016; TDOE, 2017a).

Tennessee was one of the states that originally adopted the Common Core State Standards. With an increase in rigor and expectations for literacy instruction, the standardized testing results showed that students were not able to meet the new reading demands (TDOE, 2016). The state’s end-of-the-year testing reports indicated that one in five students who had earned a proficient reading score in third grade, dropped down to a basic score by the fifth grade. More than half of the third graders who received an advanced score in reading did not receive an advanced score by the time they reached fifth grade (TDOE, 2016). These trends suggested that the literacy instruction students received in primary grades was not strong enough to carry them into later grades where “rich vocabulary, a broad base of knowledge, and critical thinking skills become even more crucial” (TDOE, 2016, p. 8).

In order to investigate what might be going on in Tennessee classrooms, state education leaders conducted classroom observations in over 150 elementary classrooms across the state. These observations showed that primary grades teachers appeared to be focusing exclusively on building students’ foundational reading skills by working on things like phonics patterns or word recognition through skills based competencies (see Figure 1), but failed to spend equal time on



Figure 1. Representation of skills-based competencies in emergent literacy. Reproduced with permission (See Appendix F). (TDOE, 2017c. *Teaching literacy in Tennessee*. Retrieved from [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/readready/documents/teaching-literacy-in-tn/teaching\\_literacy\\_in\\_tn\\_update\\_4\\_9\\_18.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/readready/documents/teaching-literacy-in-tn/teaching_literacy_in_tn_update_4_9_18.pdf)).

vocabulary and comprehension, which are more knowledge-based competencies (see Figure 2) (TDOE, 2017b). While the structural features of the classroom were changing to include more time spent reading and listening to complex texts, these shifts were not accompanied by any focused instructional shifts. For example, teachers may have been doing a read-aloud of a complex text during the beginning of a literacy block, but these readings were not followed up with activities or lesson sequences that intentionally helped the students properly comprehend the work through vocabulary or comprehension practice. As a consequence, there were students in classrooms who were “meeting the expectations of classroom assignments [but] still not attaining the level of rigor demanded by Tennessee’s academic standards” (TDOE, 2017b, p. 2).

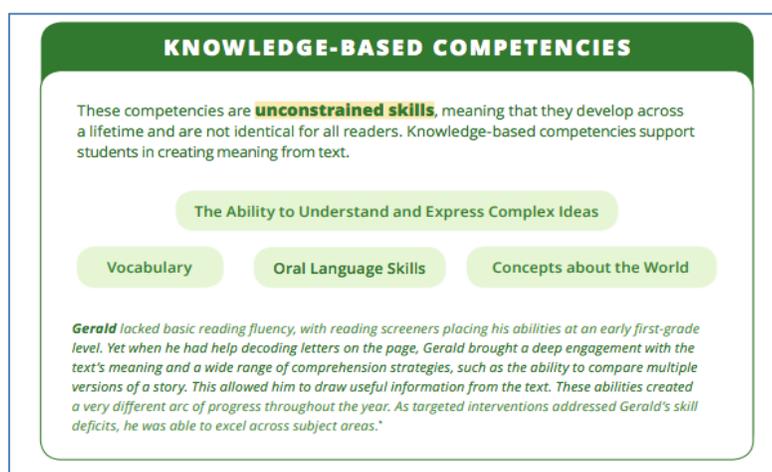


Figure 2. Representation of knowledge-based competencies in emergent literacy. Reproduced with permission (see Appendix F). (TDOE, 2017c. *Teaching literacy in Tennessee*. Retrieved from [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/readready/documents/teaching-literacy-in-tn/teaching\\_literacy\\_in\\_tn\\_update\\_4\\_9\\_18.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/readready/documents/teaching-literacy-in-tn/teaching_literacy_in_tn_update_4_9_18.pdf)).

The classroom observations that took place across the state seemed to back up the concerning trend shown in the standardized testing data. As the students spent the majority of their time learning skill-based competencies, like phonics, they rarely had the opportunity to apply these skills to a text. Meaning, they were not given the chance to read or write and use their new skills in the context for which it was meant. Only 14% of observed lessons allowed for the practice of skills through reading and writing experiences. Activities that connected these

skills in a way that required children to make meaning from the connected texts only occurred in 5% of the observed lessons (TDOE, 2017b).

Knapp (1995) conducted a longitudinal study in which instruction and student learning were examined in 140 elementary classrooms. Correlations revealed that one-third of these classrooms took on a mostly skills-based approach and one-fourth of them took on a more meaning-centered approach when it came to literacy instruction. After students were assessed on basic reading skills, comprehension, and writing, it was concluded that “students who received the most meaning-oriented instruction learned the advanced skills of reasoning, problem solving, comprehension, and composition better than the students who received skills-based instruction” (McIntyre, Rightmyer, Powell, Powers, & Petrosko, 2006, p. 53). Also, it appeared that these same students learned the basic skills of reading at least as well as the students they were compared to, who had worked in the more skills-based classrooms.

On top of that, “Only one-third of observed K-2 lessons focused on reading comprehension, and students across lessons spent less than 20 percent of their time” (TDOE, 2016, p. 14) either listening to texts being read or reading a text themselves. TDOE (2016) went on to report that in upper grades, students were only spending about 34% of their time reading, and only half of the texts being used in the classroom by the teacher to support standards learning were even at the appropriate complexity for pushing students’ critical thinking and engagement.

Allington (2014) purported that teachers should spend approximately 50% of their time having students read and engage with texts. The idea is that reading volume has a seemingly significant influence on a student’s ability to become a proficient reader. While the old saying “Practice makes perfect” is now a cliché, Allington (2014) suggested that meaningful

engagement with texts over time will positively influence students' reading achievement. Torgeson and Hudson (2006) found that in the case of struggling readers, their lack of reading volume may have played a contributing role to deficiencies built over time. "The most important factor appears to involve difficulties in making up for the huge deficits in accurate reading practice the older struggling readers have accumulated by the time they reach later elementary school" (Torgeson & Hudson, 2006, p. 148).

For some time, language arts instruction was broken down into State Performance Indicators (SPIs) which made it difficult for reading teachers to approach their pedagogy holistically. Consequently, more classroom teachers tried to teach reading skill by skill, which resulted in an environment where skills became taught in isolation rather than in context. "Learning to read with comprehension requires that students acquire and integrate an increasingly complex set of interdependent skills" (Bock & Erickson, 2015, p. 138). The isolated mastery of skills was not sufficient enough to enhance literacy mastery and led to some possible gaps in learning. Multiple components of literacy must be addressed daily in a way that focuses on the interaction of these components and allows for a comprehensive construction of reading understanding (Hume, Allan, & Lonigan, 2014; Rohde, 2015).

### **Read to Be Ready Instructional Practices**

The TDOE created a framework for teaching literacy that is grounded in the following research-based takeaways: (a) students need the opportunity to engage with a large amount of texts (Allington, 2009; Cunningham & Allington, 2011; Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998); (b) students need the opportunity to read complex texts (Adams, 2009; Brozo, 2003; Frey & Fisher, 2013; Gambrell & Morrow, 2015); (c) students need to think deeply about and respond to text through speaking and writing (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Frey & Fisher, 2013; Gambrell &

Morrow, 2015; Malloy & Gambrell, 2011; McCarrier, Pinnell, & Fountas, 2000); (d) students need to develop writing skills in connection to what they are reading (Bromley, 2015; Cunningham & Allington, 2011; Fountas & Pinnell, 2006; Graham & Harris, 2013; Griffo, Mada, Pearson, & Raphael, 2015); and (e) students need practice with foundational literacy skills that have been explicitly taught and systematically applied through reading and writing (Armbruster, Lehr, & Osborn, 2006; Blevins, 2017). Within this framework (see Figure 3) there are specific evidence-based instructional practices that are promoted through the *Read to Be Ready* initiative. These instructional practices are interactive read alouds, shared reading, small group reading, and independent reading/reading conferences.

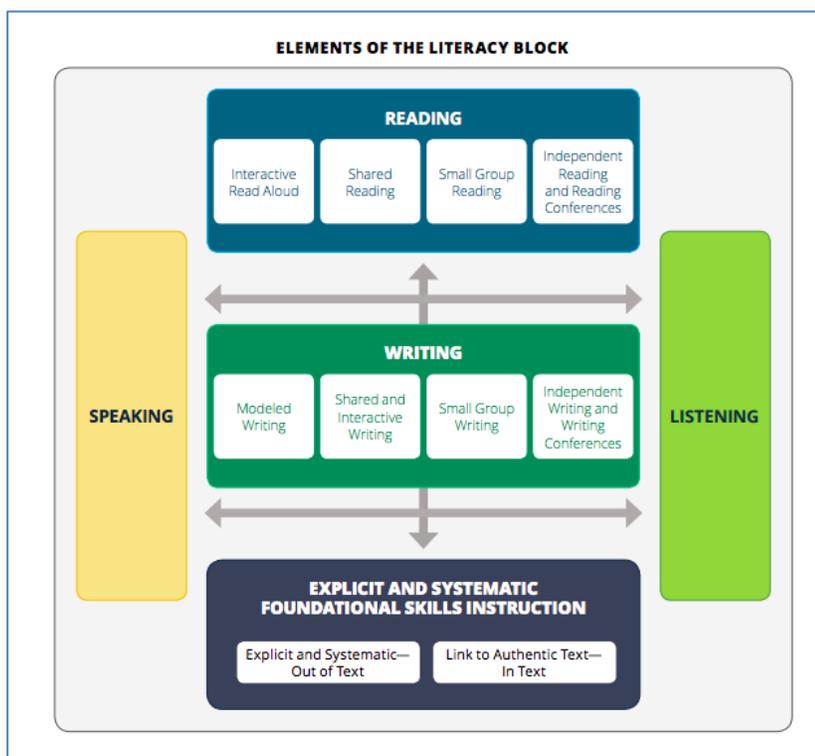


Figure 3. Representation of the framework for literacy as created by the Tennessee Department of Education. Reproduced with permission (see Appendix F). (TDOE, 2017c. *Teaching literacy in Tennessee*. Retrieved from [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/readready/documents/teaching-literacy-in-tn/teaching\\_literacy\\_in\\_tn\\_update\\_4\\_9\\_18.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/readready/documents/teaching-literacy-in-tn/teaching_literacy_in_tn_update_4_9_18.pdf)).

### Interactive Read Alouds

The technique known as Repeated Interactive Read-Aloud (RIR-A) was re-introduced and popularized by Drs. Leah M. McGee and Judith A. Schickedanz who recognized it as a

research-based approach to comprehension and vocabulary development for primary grades learners (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; Rao, Newlin-Haus, & Ehrhardt, 2016). It is a technique that allows teachers to help students “expand their vocabulary and develop oral comprehension strategies” (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007, p. 60). Instead of simply reading a book out loud to children and asking them questions at the end, interactive read aloud is a strategy that requires teachers to create a transaction between themselves and the students, as participants in the reading, while the book is being read aloud to everyone. McGee and Schickedanz (2007) suggested that teachers create opportunities for students to ask and answer questions, retell parts of the story, define words, use words from the text in a sentence, talk to peers about the text, engage in analytic thinking about the work, and become part of the story reading process.

Because literacy development actually begins for children before the formal process of classroom reading instruction does (Rao, Newlin-Haus, & Ehrhardt, 2016), interactive read aloud is a technique that has been found to support early literacy development, and can be used by anyone with young children. In addition, it has been found to be particularly powerful with younger learners, such as preschoolers and kindergarteners (Beck & McKeown, 2007; May, 2011; McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; Pentimonti, Zuker, Justice, & Kaderavek, 2010; Schickedanz & Collins, 2012). The dialogic nature of this strategy creates opportunities for children to interact with a text and promotes the “active engagement of children with reciprocal sharing of information” (Lenox, 2013). Wiseman (2011) purported that the transactional approach of interactive read alouds helps to foster an exchange between the teacher and students and creates an “interrelationship between the knower and what is to be known” (p. 431). Because of this transaction between the teacher, the students, and the text, a social and cultural

context of literacy is able to be built, which is ultimately central to how students learn (Rao et al., 2016).

The interactive read-aloud, as originally designed, is meant to be repeated at least three times, using the same text (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; Panteleo, 2007; Rao et al., 2016). However, each read of the text will have a distinct objective and work to build on the previous reading in a way that explicitly develops students' vocabulary and comprehension. During the first read, a teacher will introduce the book and use previewing strategies that will support vocabulary from the text. Some of the previewing strategies are things like giving a motion to a word so that students can act out the word and better remember its meaning, reading it, then replacing it with a synonym, or asking students to determine the meaning based on surrounding clues. The teacher will also model his or her thinking, using analytical comments and questions. Most of the questions students will be asked are open-ended questions.

On the second read, the main purpose is to help students begin to remember the text and recall information that was previously presented (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007; Rao et al., 2016). The teacher is expected to ask questions where students can explain what happened in the text and provide more opportunities for students to discuss the text analytically with peers. The teacher will likely probe students, asking more analytical questions and provide more vocabulary definitions as needed.

On the final read, the teacher introduces a guided reconstruction of the story (McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). Much of the discussion revolves around retelling the story and asking children to recall important moments. The important aspect of this particular read is that the teacher must be intentional about the questions he or she asks. The questions should go beyond surface level recall and ask students to investigate the deeper meanings of the text. Teachers

would be expected to pre-plan the questions they want to ask to ensure that they have students thinking and speaking critically about the work (Frey & Fisher, 2013).

As a result of using interactive read alouds, where teachers pose questions about a text as they read in order to help students construct meaning and better understand the text, Barrentine (1996) suggested that these conversations help students become aware of key elements in the story that they may otherwise miss. The interactive component also allows students to hear the perspectives of their peers which allows all students to become actively involved in the learning and provides a purpose for the learning process (Ayu, Diem, & Vianty, 2017). Some research has even suggested that the read aloud is a “more effective way to introduce students to the joys of reading” (Ayu et al., 2017, p. 293). Clearly, there are multiple benefits from using the interactive read aloud technique to discuss texts. As students listen to teachers model their thinking, the modeling helps students notice what the teacher is predicting, connecting, or processing in the story, which helps them understand the text deeper by hearing ideas that would not have come naturally to them as young readers.

Vocabulary depth and breadth is also built with the use of interactive read-alouds (Ayu et al., 2017; Biemiller & Boote, 2006; McGee & Schickedanz, 2007). As students listen to the stories being read aloud, they are able to hear new words in context and learn how letters and sounds are related (Biemiller & Boote, 2006). The more words students know, the easier it is for them to become engaged in other texts and become successful readers. Ultimately, an enhanced vocabulary acquired through interactive read alouds will help students become better independent readers in the future and lead them on a path to become more successful in school (Ayu et al., 2017; Biemiller & Boote, 2006; O’Flahavan, 2007; Wiseman, 2011).

Wiseman (2011) spent nine months in an urban kindergarten class where interactive read alouds were used daily. Using an ethnographic design, Wiseman's (2011) study explored how teachers can support students' learning by implementing interactive read alouds as a component of primary grades' literacy instruction. The participants were from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and minority subgroups. Wiseman (2011) revealed that when teachers were able to confirm students' thoughts, model their own thinking and reading processes, extend ideas through conversation or other learning opportunities, and build meaning through content-specific vocabulary building, students appeared to show a more complete literacy development.

In addition, Wiseman (2011) advocated that there are serious pedagogical implications for using interactive read alouds in a primary setting. It was important for teachers to use a transactional approach where readers were provided with active ways to contribute to the curriculum in ways that built on their own conceptualization of reading while the teacher was able to serve as a guide. Secondly, text selection appeared to be a big deal for encouraging classroom responses, especially finding those texts that built on student's cultural or personal interests (Lennox, 2013; Peterson & Chamberlain, 2015; Wiseman, 2011). Students that became very interested in the subject being read about showed more interest in reading further and holding conversations that built their speaking and listening skills (Wiseman, 2011).

Interactive read alouds are also a good strategy to use with students who may not speak English as their first language because of the initial vocabulary-building benefits it offers (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2013; Carlo et al., 2004; Giroir, Grimaldo, Vaughn, & Roberts, 2015). Read alouds infuse interactive, text based discussions to provide an "authentic context that makes academic language accessible and meaningful to ELs" (Giroir et al., 2015, p. 640). After collecting data from focus group interviews with teachers, using surveys, conducting formal and

informal classroom observations, and viewing teacher work samples, Giroir et al., (2015) noted that while teachers often struggle with designing and delivering literacy instruction that meets the needs of their English language learners, the use of interactive read alouds was found to be a useful and sustainable strategy for helping EL students. Giroir et al., (2015) reported another significant finding was that EL students who participated in interactive read alouds appeared to show optimized vocabulary learning and significant comprehension gains.

### **Shared Reading**

Shared reading is an instructional approach where teachers model the skills and strategies of proficient readers, while students also have access to the text and share in the workload of reading (Burkins, 2016). Students have the opportunity to observe an expert reading a text with fluency and expression but also have the opportunity to take on some of the responsibilities of reading. Unlike an interactive read aloud where students can only listen to the story, shared reading allows for students to have access to the text through the teacher's use of a Big Book. During the shared reading, teachers work to scaffold students' learning through a gradual release of responsibility model (Burkins, 2016; Burkins & Croft, 2010).

Shared reading is most valuable for explicit demonstration opportunities with shared text, so this practice finds itself sharing elements of an interactive read aloud along with elements of guided reading (Burkins, 2016). Students are able to observe the reading process and practice reading concepts in the safety of a group. Typically, the same text is read and reread several times over the period of a few days so that the teacher can begin by taking the lead and then gradually pulling back and allowing the students to master the text on their own (WGBH Educational Foundation, 2002).

Most shared reading texts should be at a level that students would be unable to read without explicit help (Button & Johnson, 1997). Shared reading was found to be better than repeated reading without such supports because of the great impact it has on the word recognition abilities of poor readers (Eldredge, Reutzel, & Hollingsworth, 1996; Gill, 2015). When students can hear words being pronounced by someone else as they follow along during a shared reading, the students are able to make connections between letters and sounds which helps them commit sight words to memory (Ehri, 2005; Eldredge et al., 1996; Gill, 2015; Kuhn & Rasinski, 2011).

In addition, shared reading of text provides students with opportunities for direct instruction where they can see teachers modeling or demonstrating reading skills and cognitive strategies and their use in real reading situations (Gill, 2015; Rupley, Blair, & Nichols, 2009). Since students can access the text as the teacher reads, and since they are asked to share in parts of the reading responsibilities, shared reading provides an opportunity for students to apply their word identification skills in context (Gill, 2015; Juel & Minden-Cupp, 2000; Rupley et al., 2009), which is a necessary component of building emergent literacy.

Interestingly, shared reading is not a uniform practice, which means that teachers' styles for shared reading may differ among classrooms. Some teachers may allow students to have more active participation than others. As well, the performance demands of the questions being asked by teachers may vary depending on the outcomes the teachers wish to see. Because participation in shared reading has such a large influence on language and literacy development (Gosen, Berenst, & de Glopper, 2015; Mol, Bus, de Jong, & Smeets, 2008; What Works Clearinghouse, 2007), Reese and Cox (1999) suggested that teachers add higher-demanding styles of shared reading to their repertoire which will require students to "go beyond the

immediate context of the text” (p. 21) to evaluate events in the story by being provided opportunities for analytical talk with the teacher and peers.

Practicing this kind of analytical talk with peers not only allows students to derive further meaning from the text, but it also allows them to discuss situations or events that they have never encountered in real life (Gosen et al., 2015; Mar & Oatley, 2008). The authentic engagement with books that shared reading opportunities bring to the classroom, allows students to explore other cultures or different people or problems that they may have never experienced (Gosen et al., 2015). This introduction to new ideas and problems builds important background knowledge for students and ultimately helps them create a model of the social world (Mar & Oatley, 2008). While students are reaping skills-based competencies from the shared reading interactions, they are also able to actively engage with texts in a way that helps them generalize information from “fictitious situations to real-life situations” (Gosen et al., 2015, p. 176).

Shared reading is a practice that has been found to have a close relationship between children’s language development and their social-emotional development (Fitzgerald, Robillard, & O’Grady, 2018; Santos, Fetig, & Shaffer, 2012). This research suggested that there is likely a tie between children’s behaviors and their literacy and language development which could be attributed to their communication abilities that are still in developmental stages (Fitzgerald et al., 2018; Hilbert & Eis, 2014; Morgan & Meier, 2008; Santos et al., 2012). As the students watch their teachers read during shared reading, they have the chance to pay close attention to the teachers’ “facial expressions, intonation, and emotional expression” (Fitzgerald et al., 2018, p. 852). When students have been strongly supported during early reading development, they are likely to build the capacity for more sophisticated language, more diverse vocabulary, and a greater ability to appropriately express themselves (Fitzgerald et al., 2018; Morgan & Meier,

2008; Santos et al., 2012). Conversely, students with lower vocabulary skills and social awareness have a limited ability to appropriately express themselves which could lead to withdrawal or negative behaviors (Fitzgerald et al., 2018; Morgan & Meier, 2008).

### **Small Group Reading**

Small group reading, also known as guided reading, has its roots in New Zealand classrooms (Clay, 1991; Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Holdaway, 1979). It began as a way to provide differentiated instruction to readers with various reading ability levels. Typically, teachers create small reading groups that are homogeneous in nature, according to reading abilities and levels. Because teaching reading one-on-one is not possible in most general education classrooms due to the large number of students in each class, small group reading is a way teachers can provide directed instruction to students on similar levels. These small groups are pulled by the teacher while other students in the class work on literacy-related tasks such as independent reading.

Guided reading is a preferred method for teaching explicit reading skills because of the deeper levels of support it can offer (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Lipp & Helfrich, 2016). Within these groups, teachers are able to differentiate instruction and be intentional about the reading skills on which students will work. Fountas and Pinnell (2012) suggested that the decisions that teachers make during guided reading lessons “become the next horizon” (p. 269) and that guided reading is the best place for helping teachers take readers from where they are to as far as they want to go.

Within this process of differentiation, teachers use short, leveled texts as the main resource for teaching focused lessons that help readers “build effective processing systems over time” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 268). Books are selected with students’ needs and skills in

mind, so that with strong teaching, readers can build up to work with more challenging texts over time. Most schools or classrooms have leveled libraries where teachers collect short texts at various levels and organize boxes and shelves by these levels to make it easier for people to find the books they need. In essence, the term level just refers to the “gradient of texts [used] to organize collections of books for instruction” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 270). Teachers will use this gradient to create a series of goals that will help students reach certain sets of reading competencies by the end of the school year.

Many schools that use the guided reading approach will have a standardized way for assessing students’ independent and instructional reading levels (Clay, 1993; Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). These assessments are normally called Running Records (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Students will read for a teacher, and the teacher will code the students’ reading behaviors. These coded reading behaviors will be scored, based on accuracy levels, and teachers will decide the most appropriate reading level based on the information that is revealed. The assessment of reading behaviors goes beyond accurate word calling. Teachers are also concerned about fluency, a student’s ability to process texts smoothly and efficiently (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). As teachers listen to students read, they are also concerned about comprehension and students’ abilities to recall details and retell a story after the reading is finished. Careful analysis of these Running Records over time can help a teacher determine how students respond to difficult texts and can shape future teaching moments (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016).

Choosing books for guided reading requires more effort than simply choosing levels, though that is where most teachers will start (Clay 2005; Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Skilled teachers of guided reading should “understand how a text requires a reader to think” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 277). Therefore, planning becomes an essential component of leading small

group reading opportunities. Teachers must consider many characteristics related to the text such as its genre, its structure, its content and themes, and its language and literary features (Frey & Fisher, 2013; Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). Fountas & Pinnell (2012) stated the ability to analyze texts is one of the key components of teacher knowledge that needs to be better developed. “When you understand the inner workings of a text, you can introduce it well and guide a powerful discussion” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 278).

The small group framework provided through guided reading can facilitate and encourage fluent reading. For emerging readers, fluency is one of the most important skills teachers work to build, so it is important for students to have multiple opportunities to read a variety of texts at their instructional levels (Clay, 2005; Lipp & Helfrich, 2016). Every group lesson begins by having student’s read the previous day’s book which is known as a “familiar read” (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016, p. 641). This familiar read is a text that is at the student’s independent or instructional reading level and is one that the student has read before. The reason for using a familiar read to build fluency is that it helps students actually have a chance at becoming fluent since they are not having to exert too much effort on decoding or meaning-making (Clay, 2005; Lipp & Helfrich, 2016).

During this fluency warm-up, each student in the group will read their familiar read aloud, but quietly. The teacher listens to each student as they read, making sure they are practicing good fluency. If the teacher hears any issues, he or she should intervene and model how the text should be read (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016). Students may also listen to one another during this fluency warm-up time and provide feedback to their peers. Guided reading becomes effective when a skillful teacher collects evidence from how students read and what they reveal

through conversation about what they read and then takes the appropriate steps to offer explicit instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012).

After the warm-up, a new book is introduced to the group. The new book should be “at the edge of students’ instructional level; not too easy but not too hard (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016, p. 643; Vygotsky, 1978). The introduction to the new book often looks like a conversation between the students and teacher where the teacher offers supports in advance to set the readers up for a successful read (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016). Beyond a simple picture walk, teachers in a guided reading lesson will set students up for understanding by going over unusual phrases, any strange names, odd structural features, or building background knowledge about a topic that could be unfamiliar. Often times, teachers will ask questions that will get their students thinking beyond the text, by having them make predictions or by creating excitement about the ending of the work (Ford & Opitz, 2008; Lipp & Helfrich, 2016).

As students work through the new read, teachers make observations and analyze the reading behaviors carefully. Obviously, teachers cannot see into the brains of their students to watch their mental processing, but skillful teachers can notice and look for the evidence of skillful processing by paying attention to reading behaviors (Clay, 1991; Fountas & Pinnell, 2012). No longer are small group reading teachers only monitoring for speed, they are also looking for pausing, phrasing, word stress, and intonation over rate. Rasinski and Hamman (2010) purported that the norms for reading speed have gone up, but these increases have not been matched by students’ achievement in reading comprehension. As students read, all the behaviors that enhance both fluency and comprehension should be monitored (Newkirk, 2011; Rasinski & Hamman, 2010).

As students progress in their reading skills, teachers must become experts at creating and recreating new groups in order to “allow for the differences in learning that are evident in students” (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 275). Keeping the small groups dynamic, is an important concept in running small reading groups appropriately. Some students do not develop their reading behaviors at the same pace or in the same order as other students. Using ongoing assessments to check informal observations against what students actually demonstrate when they are asked to read a text without teacher support can help teachers make decisions concerning where and with whom students should be placed during small group reading time (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012; Lipp & Helfrich, 2016). Fluid grouping of students allows teachers to honor the complexity of reading development by keeping options open for readers who are at different points, at different points in time, concerning their reading behaviors and abilities.

### **Independent Reading and Reading Conferences**

Independent reading and independent reading conferences are the final component in the TDOE (2017c) literacy framework. Ideally, students in elementary grades should be engaged daily in the independent reading of self-selected texts (Boushey & Moser, 2012; Brown, 2013, Hall, Hedrick, & Williams, 2014; Lee & Schmitt, 2014; Nielsen, 2016; Pletcher & Christensen, 2017; Sanden, 2014; Walker, 2013). During this independent reading time, the teacher can take time to listen to a child read from a selection, talk to a child about the text, discuss points based on the child’s reading ability, set reading goals, or assist a child in choosing a new book to read (Pletcher & Christensen, 2017). The purpose of these conversations is to allow the teacher time to explicitly teach reading strategies or skills directly to a student, on his or her instructional level (Clay, 1991; Unrau & Alvermann, 2013; Walker, 2013). These conferences are basically learning conversations that a teacher cannot necessarily script. Although the conferences are

informal and short (not more than five minutes each), they should still have a structure that allows the teacher and the student to stay focused on their objective (Boushey & Moser, 2012; Pletcher & Christensen, 2017).

Independent reading conferences fall within the theoretical framework of Vygotsky (1978) who developed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as part of his theory on social constructivism (Pletcher & Christensen, 2017; Unrau & Alvermann, 2013). Vygotsky (1978) defined the ZPD as the difference between what a person can achieve alone and what a person can achieve with the help of a more knowledgeable other. Independent reading conferences allow a teacher to deliver instruction right at a student's point of need, which is meant to make new learning more accessible for the child (Clay, 1991; Hall et al., 2014; Lee & Schmitt, 2014, Kim, 2010; Pletcher & Christensen, 2017; Unrau & Alvermann, 2013; Walker, 2013).

As teachers meet with students individually, they can provide feedback and or prompting, which helps students work within their ZPD and eventually create a "self-extending system" (Clay, 1991) that helps the students take more ownership of the reading process. That ownership takes place as students begin to be able to monitor their own reading and correct any mistakes or misunderstandings they may have been having (Johnston, 2012; Pletcher & Christensen, 2017; Sanden, 2014). With direct teacher instruction, and the teacher's use of language that builds a child's use of strategies to a more complex level, agency in reading is created (Brown, 2013; Pletcher & Christensen, 2017; Porath, 2014).

Because the teacher is meeting with several students during their independent reading time, it is suggested that multiple notes be taken so that the teacher can refer back to them prior to new conferencing (Boushey & Moser, 2012). Notetaking can help the teacher remember what reading skills were most recently addressed and reflect on any advances or lapses made in that

particular area. Notetaking also helps the teacher prepare to provide the individualized instruction each student needs (Pletcher & Christensen, 2017).

The goal for each independent reading conference is for students to become acquainted with or extend their knowledge of a reading strategy or skill (Hall et al., 2014; Nielsen, 2016; Porath, 2014; Walker, 2013). The gradual release approach is typically used so that the teacher can facilitate the learning before releasing a student to try new instruction too quickly. Scaffolding plays a large part in this type of instruction, and as a result of teachers focusing on students' reading strengths and then delivering instruction based on those strengths, several studies have documented growth in students' independent reading levels (Kim, 2010; Pletcher & Christensen, 2017; Rodgers, 2004).

The scaffolding is a social process where the teacher tunes in to the needs of the reader and then responds in a manner that is specific to that reader and that text (Brown, 2013; Lee & Schmitt, 2014; Pletcher & Christensen, 2017; Walker, 2013). Long-term scaffolding also occurs as teachers host these independent reading conferences throughout the school year and document the reading behaviors they notice. Independent conferencing allows teachers to specifically differentiate their reading instruction in a way that is not always possible in whole or small group sessions (Pletcher & Christensen, 2017; Sanden, 2013). Interestingly, a study conducted by Pletcher & Christensen (2017) presented evidence that even in their independent differentiation of reading instruction, most teachers used prompts that promoted reading accuracy over any "other aspects of the reading process" (p. 10).

### **Transfer of Teacher Professional Development**

Transfer of professional development involves using the knowledge and skills learned in job training to productively enhance job performance (Gegenfurtner, 2013). McDonald (2014)

defined transfer as a transformational process in which teachers incorporate ideas from professional learning to “improve teacher practice [and] to improve student outcomes” (p. 1571). Understanding what motivates teachers to transfer and apply their new learning is important because schools and state education organizations spend ample time, money, and resources trying to increase teachers’ learning in order to also increase student achievement (Gegenfurtner, 2013; McDonald, 2014; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015).

There has been much research done on the transfer of professional development to teachers’ classroom practice, and it appears that much of that research is inconclusive as far as what makes a teacher decide to apply professional development content to his or her practice (Desimone et al., 2002; Jamil & Hamre, 2018; Le Fevre, 2014; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). Desimone et al., (2002) conducted a three-year longitudinal study to see if professional development had any effects on teacher instruction. A purposeful sample of teachers were examined to measure the effects and impact of professional development when it was focused on specific instructional practices. The researchers sought to determine if those same practices were ever implemented in the classroom.

Desimone et al., (2002) found that active learning opportunities offered through the professional development increased the likelihood of teachers implementing the instructional strategies in their classrooms. “Reform type” (p. 85) professional development opportunities (things like teacher networks, internships, mentoring, and visiting resource centers) which are different from traditional professional development opportunities (district meetings, conferences, college courses), were reported to garner more significant change in teacher classroom practices. When the reform type professional development opportunities were focused and intentional on a

particular subject area, the chances of classroom practices changing were even greater (Desimone, et al., 2002; Yoon, 2007).

The *Read to be Ready* training would be considered a reform type of professional development. The system has been set up to look like one big coaching network in which teachers gather together in collaborative meetings to explore topics of literacy instruction and practice them with colleagues. Teachers are also given chances to plan text sets together, create interactive read aloud lesson plans together, and dialogue through potential classroom scenarios in order to gain confidence in the use of the strategies being taught. The meetings are blended so that teachers have the opportunity to meet with other reading teachers across the state and then work out their new learning with their own colleagues and camp instructors at following meetings. Desimone, et al., (2002) cited there was clear evidence provided that when teachers learn as a group and implement new strategies within the same school, they are more successful at integrating and sustaining them.

Another problem reported by teachers is a low self-efficacy concerning the implementation of improved literacy techniques (Ermeling, 2010; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Le Fevre, 2014; Strauss, 2014; Varghese et al., 2016). Teachers can feel intimidated to try new practices. They may also feel unsure about how to begin the process, and many study participants noted a desire to have the help of a coach or colleague before dramatically changing their literacy instruction (Desimone et al., 2002; Strauss, 2014; Varghese et al., 2016).

As mentioned earlier, the *Read to be Ready* network is a coaching-based model which is being used to try to support teachers across the state of Tennessee as they work to implement new literacy strategies. “Increasingly, coaching-based professional development models are used to support classroom teachers' implementation of the literacy interventions” (Varghese, et

al., 2016, p. 228). The researchers in this particular study looked at a coaching-based model to see how it aligned with teachers transferring professional development to the classroom, as well as how this model affected their self-efficacy with providing appropriate literacy instruction. The goal was to look at teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy since that has often been associated with high-quality instruction and improved student outcomes.

Varghese et al., (2016) found that teacher self-efficacy played a large role in determining how literacy instruction looks in a classroom as well as what student reading achievement looks like. It appeared that efficacy relates to a teacher's ability to create high-quality learning environments and support critical-thinking across various tasks; therefore, a coaching model of professional development was better suited for raising teacher self-efficacy in the area of literacy instruction. Teachers develop perceptions of their instructional competence that may link to specific outcomes like students' literacy achievement (Varghese et al., 2016; Yoon, 2007). Coaching-based professional development "...models may positively impact classroom teachers' self-efficacy, which is critical to effective literacy instruction" (Varghese et al., 2016, p. 229).

### **Summary**

Beyond the weighty measures of student engagement and achievement, early reading success is important for social and economic well-being. In today's global society, a high school diploma is no longer sufficient to prepare students for engaging in the modern economy. A WEF (2016) report revealed that "nearly 50% of subject knowledge acquired during the first year of a four-year technical degree [will be] outdated by the time students graduate" (p. 20). As it stands, only 8% of eighth-graders who fell below reading proficiency marks on standardized testing were deemed college-ready when compared to the college-readiness benchmark of the ACT

(TDOE, 2016). To suggest that the literacy demands necessary to navigate this world have increased significantly is no exaggeration.

The problem is that across the nation, reading proficiency scores are at a staggering low (The Nation's Report Card, 2017). Increasingly, students from minority backgrounds and from economically disadvantaged homes are showing the greatest need for reading intervention (Stairs-Davenport & Chenard, 2016). The summer months off from school are considered to be important factors that contribute to this reading gap (McDaniel et al., 2017; Petty et al., 2017; Zvoch & Stevens, 2015), and summer reading intervention has shown positive results for preventing summer slide (Christodoulou et al., 2017; Zvoch & Stevens, 2015).

In addition, classroom observations across the state of Tennessee revealed that primary grades teachers appeared to be focusing exclusively on building students' foundational reading skills by working on things like phonics patterns or word recognition but failed to spend equal time on vocabulary and comprehension, which are more knowledge-based competencies (TDOE, 2017b). While the structural features of the classroom were changing to include more time spent reading and listening to complex texts, these shifts were not accompanied by any focused instructional shifts. As a consequence, there were students in reading classrooms who were "meeting the expectations of classroom assignments [but] still not attaining the level of rigor demanded" (TDOE, 2017b, p. 2) by the academic standards.

It is expected that teacher training that is targeted and focused on improving these early literacy foundational practices will help teachers build classrooms that are more focused on an integrative approach to literacy. Research results are mixed when it comes to teacher transfer of professional development, but a longitudinal study by Desimone et al., (2002) suggested that active learning opportunities, similar to the *Read to Be Ready* training provided to Tennessee

primary grades teachers, offered through a professional development model increased the likelihood of teachers implementing the instructional practices in their classrooms. In addition, when reform type PD opportunities were focused and intentional on a particular subject area, the chances of transferring those reforms to the classroom were greatly increased.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

### Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to present the procedures and design that guided this case study, describing the implementation process of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices for 12 elementary teachers in southeast Tennessee. In this chapter, the design of the study is detailed, including why it is appropriate for this research. All research questions are presented. This chapter explains how participants for the study were chosen and provides important information about the site that was chosen. The procedures, data collection methods, and data analysis steps are clearly explained. Information on the trustworthiness of the study and any ethical considerations that are important to know are also detailed in this chapter.

### Design

Qualitative designs allow the researcher to collect data in natural settings and position the study within the current context of participants' experiences (Creswell, 2013). There are typically no metrics or instruments involved, instead, the researcher collects data as a human instrument and filters it through his or her theoretical lens. The use of a qualitative design allows the researcher to collect data in a variety of ways, such as through interviews and observations, which make it possible for the researcher to interact with participants within their natural environment (Creswell, 2013). The interaction with participants is necessary in this study because the experience of implementation of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices cannot be thoroughly understood unless teachers who are having this experience give proper voice to it. The implementation takes place in the context of a classroom which influences the phenomenon and must be observed to explore how the phenomenon interacts with its context.

The qualitative research process is not cold or distant; there is a distinct human element

involved. Because of the constant interaction and the way themes emerge through the analyzing process, the researcher is able to focus on letting the meaning come from the lived experiences/narratives of the participants instead of trying to assign that meaning him or herself. In this way, new perspectives or diverse views are able to emerge and highlight new “truths” (Creswell, 2013).

Stake (1995) suggested that in education, people and programs are often cases of interest. For this study, the case consists of one school district, located in southeast Tennessee, wherein three elementary schools were studied as embedded subunits of the case. Among the three schools, 12 elementary teachers acted as participants in the case study. Each of these 12 teachers was trained on using *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices, and each of these 12 teachers worked at least four weeks at a *Read to Be Ready* summer literacy camp. With the specialized training and camp experience, these 12 teachers worked to implement *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in their general classroom routines.

People and programs make for prospective cases because they are part of an integrated, “bounded system” (Stake, 1995, p. 2). The whole purpose of qualitative case study is to examine real cases that are operating in real situations (Stake, 1995). Case study is the preferred method when the phenomenon being studied cannot be separated from its context (Yin, 2018). It is particularly suitable when the experiences of the participants matter and contemporary events (Myers, 2003) influence practitioner outcomes. Case study research is most often used to “capture and formalize the knowledge of practitioners” (Benbasat, Goldstein, & Mead, 1987, p. 370) and develop theories from practice. Case study was the right design for this study because it was important to understand what could be learned from this district that was implementing a program and how teacher participants from this district experienced the implementation process.

The phenomenon of implementation can in no way be separated from the context of the classroom. The knowledge captured from these 12 practitioners could provide insight into helping teachers and administrators understand the real experiences associated with the implementation of new programs or initiatives.

In addition, Yin (2018) explained that case study designs are appropriate to use when the phenomenon being studied may result in many more variables of interest than just data points, when multiple sources of evidence are needed to triangulate findings, and when the study is being guided by theoretical propositions that guide the data collection and analysis processes. This study was guided by Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory and looked to see how SCT supported the implementation experiences that participants had. This study sought to examine if teachers' behaviors were influenced by the perceived costs and perceived benefits of implementing new instructional practices.

Because it can be difficult to determine the lines where the case ends and "its environment begins" (Stake, 1995, p. 37), the bounds and contexts of the case must be specified. Stake (1995) referred to this as knowing the particulars of a case. Researchers using a case study design must come to know a case well, "what it is, what it does" (p. 8). Because this case study relates to the researcher's professional interests, there was a need to understand the circumstances and conditions surrounding teachers' implementation of instructional practices, which created a desire to pursue this as a case study.

However, for the purposes of this study, there were units of analysis that occurred at more than one level (Yin, 2018). This case study was about the experiences of implementation of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices, but further analysis considered school-specific characteristics that may have influenced implementation behaviors. Due to the subunit analysis

that occurred concerning school-specific experiences, this case study utilized an embedded case study design (Yin, 2018).

Yin (2018) described embedded case studies as a single case study that involves more than one unit of analysis. This is an appropriate type of design to use when the researcher wants to examine the case using a more detailed level of inquiry (Yin, 2018). While there is a single case involved in this study, the one school district, three elementary schools within this district were evaluated to see how different environments might affect implementation behaviors. Using the embedded case study design helped create a better description of how the phenomenon interacted within its context and identified themes that transcended across all three subunits.

Contemporary case study research has origins in anthropology, psychology, and sociology (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017). Stewart (2014) noted that Charles Darwin utilized the case study design in much of his work. This design was most often used by social scientists who sought to describe the lives and experiences of people within their natural settings and stemmed from phenomenological research (Harrison et al., 2017); however, it fell out of favor in the late 1940s when quantitative data began to be preferred (Johansson, 2003). Case studies were still used after this time, but more as descriptive research to help validate quantitative results (Merriam, 2009). Once researcher, Robert Yin, developed a methodology for the process of case study, it became a more widely accepted practice in the scientific community (Brown, 2008; Yin, 2014).

Yin (2002) advocated to make case study a legitimate method of research. According to the Yin (2002) methodology, all data collection and analysis must be guided by existing theoretical propositions and triangulated to help answer *how* and *why* questions about a particular case. There must be a consistency among the design of the case study research and the actual

research phases to ensure every decision in the research process aligns with the characteristics of the case and the theoretical proposition that backs it (Yazan, 2015).

Yin's (2002) methodology was used for this research because it is a comprehensive research strategy that helped focus the questions, design, and research on the theoretical propositions offered by Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory. This methodology helps support case study as a relevant research design, but it also helps formulate a design that allows the researcher to connect the empirical data to a study's research questions and ultimately, to any conclusions which may be presented (Yazan, 2015).

For this study, the case study design was appropriate because the problem could only be explored by talking to people who were on the ground for the *Read to Be Ready* training and who worked as teachers for the summer literacy camps. The case consisted of 12 elementary grades teachers who were bounded within a single school district in southeast Tennessee, within a specific time, and whom worked on three different school campuses. Each of the participants in the case received specialized *Read to Be Ready* training. The embedded case study design allowed for a description of implementation experiences within the site and helped identify common themes that transcended the embedded units.

### **Research Questions**

**Central Research Question:** What are the experiences teachers have when implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in their general classroom settings?

**Subquestion 1:** What are the supports teachers identify as necessary in the implementation process?

**Subquestion 2:** How do school specific characteristics influence teachers' choices regarding the implementation of the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices?

**Subquestion 3:** What are the perceived costs of implementing the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices?

**Subquestion 4:** What are the perceived benefits of implementing the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices?

### **Setting**

For the purposes of this case study, the site consisted of a school district in southeast Tennessee where 12 elementary teachers worked to implement *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices. This district was specifically chosen for this study since its reading proficiency data was representative of national and state proficiency data.

The school district in this study had about ten public schools. This district had an approximate enrollment of 6,000 students. Almost 400 teachers were employed by this school district. There was a large population of economically disadvantaged students, who composed about 45% of the total population. The demographics broke down to approximately 60% White, 24% Hispanic, and 14% African American. In addition, about 15% of the population were classified as students with disabilities. At the time of this study, there were almost 10% of students in the district who were classified as ELL. TDOE (2017d) reported approximately 34% of students in this district scored at or above proficiency on standardized tests of reading, which was equivalent to overall state scores.

Of the six elementary schools in the district, four of them qualified to receive a *Read to Be Ready* camp grant. In order to qualify for this grant, schools must show a strong level of need. These needs may be factors such as academic deficiencies (a large percentage of students scoring below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile in reading on a universal screener), diverse student population

including a large population of English language learners, or socioeconomic need (more than 50% of students qualify for free/reduced lunch).

One of the schools in the district that qualified for the grant was the one in which the researcher worked, so this school was removed from the list of possible embedded subunits. The three remaining schools had unique initiatives, locations, and historical roles that set them apart from each other. The differences among these schools made them ideal subunits to study within the case because there was maximum variation among the three schools. Maximum variation in a case study is important because it yields shared patterns that cut across the case and become more significant since the findings emerge out of “heterogeneity” (Patton, 2002, p. 235).

### **Heathcliff Elementary**

The first school in this district where teachers are worked to implement *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices shall be known as Heathcliff Elementary – a pseudonym given to protect its identity. Heathcliff Elementary employed 21 teachers and had 376 students enrolled in grades K-5. Over half the student population was considered economically disadvantaged, with 57.5% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. The school had a diverse population, with 43% White, 29% Hispanic, and 22% African American. About one-fifth of the population was labeled ELL, with 20.47% of students participating in the English language learner program. In addition, 13.3% of students qualified as students with disabilities.

### **Thomas Elementary**

The second elementary school in this district where teachers were going to experience the implementation of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices was somewhat less diverse. For the purposes of this study, the school will be referred to as Thomas Elementary, in an effort to protect its identity. Thomas Elementary employed 29 teachers and had 448 students enrolled in

grades K-5. A little less than half of the population was considered economically disadvantaged, with 47.9% of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch. About 65% of students at Thomas Elementary were White, 24% Hispanic, and 7% African American. The ELL program was smaller than at Heathcliff Elementary, and 16.51% of students participated in it. Approximately 16.5% of students were considered students with disabilities.

### **Cherry St. Elementary**

The third elementary school in this district, where teachers worked to implement *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices will be referred to as Cherry St. Elementary. Cherry St. is a pseudonym that will be used to protect the identity of this school. This school employed 42 teachers and enrolled 639 students. Interestingly, this elementary school had a much larger population of socioeconomically disadvantaged students than the other two elementary schools named in this study. Approximately 70.0% of students who attended Cherry St. Elementary were considered economically disadvantaged. The majority of students at this school were White, with 64% of students identifying as White. About 18% of students identified as Hispanic, and 13% of students identified as African American. Only 13.30% of students participated in the school's ELL program. Out of the three elementary schools in this study, this school also had the largest population of students with disabilities at 21.4%.

### **Participants**

A purposeful, criterion-based sample was used to find participants for this study. The selection criteria were as follows: (a) must be an instructor at an elementary school that had received a *Read to Be Ready* Summer Camp Grant; (b) the school site must run a summer camp where at least four teachers have worked; (c) the school site must utilize the services of an instructional coach who had received the *Ready to Be Ready* training and who regularly coached

teachers from this school; (d) the teacher must have taught at a summer camp site for a full four weeks; (e) the teacher must be employed as a teacher for grades K-5; and (f) the teacher must work in the school district being studied.

From the district site being studied, there were approximately 35 potential participants who met the above criterion. Once approval to collect data was received from the IRB and from the school district's superintendent, the three elementary schools' principals sent out an invitation to the 35 potential participants, asking them if they would like to participate in the study. The goal was to have at least four participants from each school site. Crouch and McKenzie (2006) maintained that having less than 20 participants in a qualitative study helps a researcher build and keep closer relationships with participants, and the smaller number improves the quality of information exchange. While, Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggested that sample sizing follow the concept of theoretical saturation, that is, stopping when the researcher has interacted with the number needed to fully inform all elements of the phenomenon being studied and new data does not bring new information, Crouch and McKenzie (2006) purported that 12-15 is typically the number of participants needed to help reach theoretical saturation.

If there was an overwhelming response to participation, the demographics form would have been used to help find maximum variation among the participants and narrow down the list of volunteers. However, this did not happen. Questions were on the demographic form to help find participants with a variety of years' experience, education levels, commitment to the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices, and frequency of use of the practices.

Once participants volunteered to participate in the study and signed an informed consent (see Appendix B), they were asked to complete a demographics form that provided the researcher with information that was important to have during the data analysis process. The

questionnaire asked participants for educational background information like certifications received, number of years' experience, and grade level taught. It also asked them to provide their gender and other identifying information (see Appendix C).

At Heathcliff Elementary, no participants were male, and all four participants were female. Three of the participants were Caucasian, and one participant was African American. Three of the participants had between four and nine years' teaching experience, and one had between ten and 20 years' teaching experience. Only one of the instructors had more than one year of experience instructing at a *Read to Be Ready* summer literacy camp.

At Thomas Elementary, no participants were male, and all four participants were female. All of the participants were Caucasian. Two of the participants had between four and nine years' teaching experience, one had between ten and 20 years' teaching experience, and one had more than 20 years' experience. Only one of the instructors had more than one year of experience instructing at a *Read to Be Ready* summer literacy camp.

At Cherry St. Elementary, one participant was male, and the other three participants were female. All of the participants were Caucasian. One participant had between four and nine years' teaching experience, two participants had between ten and 20 years' teaching experience, and one participant had over twenty years' experience. Only one of the instructors had more than one year of experience instructing at a *Read to Be Ready* summer literacy camp.

### **Procedures**

Before any data was collected, approval was received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The superintendent of the school district being studied was contacted for permission to conduct the study once IRB approval came through, although, informal approval by the superintendent had already been given before the study began. Three elementary subunits

were a part of this case, so the principal of each elementary school was contacted to secure permission to interview and observe teachers. Each participant in the study was asked to sign an informed consent form before participation began and to complete a demographics form.

Because a purposeful, criterion-based sample was needed, principals of the three schools were asked to send an email that called for volunteers to participate in this study, based on the criterion provided. The site directors of these schools' *Read to Be Ready* summer literacy camps were also asked to send out an invitation for participants who meet the criteria.

As the 2017 summer camps took place, each of the elementary schools were visited on multiple occasions to begin to informally get to know each of the teachers working them. As a former campsite director, the researcher helped the new site directors by volunteering to be on hand and gave advice about lesson planning, budgeting, or transportation. An effort was made to connect with potential participants and build rapport. Once all official approvals were received to begin the study, an effort was made to reach out to those who responded to the principals' invitations and said they were interested in participating. A meeting was set up where the study was explained and participants received the opportunity to sign an informed consent as well as fill out a form that provided important demographic data.

Each participant was observed in his or her classroom on two occasions. Both observations were announced and lasted for 30 minutes. Notes were taken using a researcher-created protocol for note-taking that included both reflective and descriptive notes (see Appendix D). A checklist that contained specific *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices was used to determine which practices were being used in the general classroom (see Appendix E).

After the observations, semi-structured, individual interviews were scheduled with participants where open-ended questions about their experiences implementing the *Read to Be*

*Ready* instructional practices in the general classroom setting were asked. Interviews were recorded using an audio recorder. Each participant was interviewed one time. The recordings from each interview were transcribed.

Participants were also asked for documents, like training materials and lesson plans, to analyze as part of the study. Each participant was asked to volunteer these materials. After the data was collected, all forms of the data were coded. Themes that emerged that helped provide a description of the case are presented in the findings.

### **The Researcher's Role**

Throughout this study, I acted as the human instrument for data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Therefore, any data collected was analyzed and filtered through my philosophical assumptions and the theoretical framework supporting this study. In this case study, I entered the lives of the participants through the role of a nonparticipant observer. This relationship introduced dynamics that may have affected the interpretation of the data. When the researcher is the primary agent of data collection, “Data are mediated through this human instrument, the researcher, rather than through some inanimate inventory, questionnaire, or computer” (Merriam, 1998, p. 7).

I had a professional relationship to the site being studied. The district in this embedded case study was the one in which I worked as an Assistant Principal. I have interacted with participants in district-wide professional meetings, but I have had no other personal or professional interactions with them. None of the participants in my study have ever worked at the same school as me. All of the potential participants recognized me as a former site director of a *Read to Be Ready* camp, and they all saw me help their site camp directors plan for their summer camp events.

Due to my training as a *Read to Be Ready* coach and the time I have spent coaching teachers to use these literacy practices, I have a direct interest in this study. This connection to the study required me to be aware of any assumptions or biases that may have colored the findings. Yin (2018) wrote that these subtle influences can create a methodological threat. In order to identify areas of potential bias, I used reflexive bracketing throughout the research process and worked to set them aside. While reflexive bracketing helped me separate my personal connection to the study, it also helped me become more deeply reflective as I designed the study, collected the data, and analyzed and reported the findings (Tufford & Newman, 2010).

### **Data Collection**

Data collection in a case study can be time consuming and result in a massive amount of data, especially since in qualitative research the data collection and data analyzing often occur as simultaneous activities (Creswell, 2015). Though the process is not necessarily linear, there are important steps to consider before collecting any data. Because the case study design required full access to the site and to participants, it was ensured that all permissions were received by the IRB, the school district's superintendent, and the three schools' principals before any data was collected.

Qualitative research designs are unique in that most of the information gathering occurs in face-to-face interactions. This requires the researcher to be sensitive to the personal nature of the study (Creswell, 2015). Researchers must be aware of the possible bias and subjectivity that could influence data collection activities. Due to the sensitivity of the data collection process, all the challenges and ethical considerations applicable to this study were carefully considered.

## Observations

Observation is the process in which researchers gather information first-hand by observing participants in their natural settings, at the selected research site (Creswell, 2015).

This is an important data collection method for a case study since it allows the researcher to study actions and behaviors within the bounded system being explored (Yin, 2018).

Observations have great potential for discovery in comparison to other qualitative data collection methods because they do not rely on self-reporting (Mays & Pope, 1995; Morgan, Pullon, Macdonald, McKinlay, & Gray, 2017; Murphy & Dingwall, 2007). Taking part in observations allows the researcher to get an understanding of context, structures, or behaviors, which interviewees may not even be aware of (Morgan et al., 2017). Observation provides “insight into interactions between dyads and groups; illustrates the whole picture; captures context/process; and informs about the influence of the physical environment” (Mulhall, 2003, p. 307). Taking the opportunity to observe people within their natural setting can likely reveal much more information than individuals would ever be able to recall, and it can even help the researcher see things that a participant might not wish to report or even be aware of (Mays & Pope, 1995; Morgan et al., 2017; Mulhall, 2003).

Observation was set as the first method of data collection so that a clear understanding of the participants’ context and working environments could be determined. Also, this allowed for the opportunity to ask questions or clarify things that were noted during the observations with participants once the follow-up interviews took place. This opportunity for clarifying helped ensure valid results and made sure there was a correct interpretation of the things seen and heard during the observations. If interviews had been the first data collection method point, there would not have been another opportunity to ask questions about anything seen during the

observation. It also allowed the follow-up chance to ask why certain decisions were made regarding instructional practices, when necessary.

The site and each embedded subunit in this case study was selected according to pre-selected criteria. As a visitor to this unique site, the researcher acted as a nonparticipant observer. This role afforded the opportunity to study the participants in action and to take notes at a distance (Creswell, 2013), without being directly involved in their teaching activities and/or lesson planning.

Before any data collection began, participants met to sign an informed consent. They also filled out a form that provided important demographic information like years of experience, education level, certifications, and grade levels taught. The first official step in the data collection process was to visit participants during their regular classroom instruction time and conduct classroom observations. Each participant was observed twice. Both observations were announced. Each of the observations lasted for thirty minutes.

During the observations, notes were taken to see which, if any, of the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices were being incorporated into the lesson. Specifically, a checklist was developed to look for interactive read alouds, shared reading, small group reading, or independent reading being utilized in the classrooms. The use of these practices was apparent, as these practices differ from the typical skills-based practices often looked for during lesson evaluations in this school district. A checklist of the specific components of these instructional practices can be found in Appendix E.

An observation protocol (Creswell, 2013) was designed that created a specific method for recording notes while in the field (see Appendix D.) These field notes were later transcribed into an electronic format (Yin, 2014). The protocol included recording both descriptive and

reflective notes. Descriptive notes are detailed and accurate descriptions of what the researcher sees, hears, and experiences (Bogdan & Birklen, 1982). As teachers were observed in action, descriptions of participants, settings, communications, non-verbal communications, events, and behaviors were recorded. These notes were useful for helping to summarize the ways activities unfolded during each observation session (Creswell, 2013).

Recording reflective notes helped build on the descriptive notes by providing a personal account of what was learned during the observations. These notes went beyond general descriptions to include any impressions, speculations, clarifications, plans for future questioning, and other ideas that occurred during the time spent in the classrooms (Bogdan & Birklen, 1982). The reflective notes provided a context and framework from which to interpret the descriptive notes.

## **Interviews**

Yin (2014) purported that interviews are a crucial source of evidence for case study research because they can provide in-depth insights into the behaviors and choices of people, as well as help the researcher identify other relevant sources of information. In this study, one, in-person, semi-structured interview was conducted. Prior to the interview, each participant was asked to sign a consent form and allowed to preview the questions in advance. Every interview was recorded using an audio-recording device. A professional transcriptionist was hired to transcribe each interview and asked to ensure the transcriptions were verbatim (Yin, 2014).

The interviews were conducted at each participant's school site. Participants were told to allow for at least 45-60 minutes for the interviews to take place. Interview protocols are outlined in Table 1. The protocol was developed using open-ended questions that align with this study's research questions and are grounded in the literature (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). In

addition, two experts in the field of early literacy development, a supervisor of elementary curriculum and a regional *Read to Be Ready* coach, were asked to review the interview questions. Based on their feedback, the questions were refined as needed (Yin, 2014).

Questions one and two were designed to help build rapport with the participants (Patton, 2015) and try to find out more about what motivated each of them to become teachers and to become a part of the *Read to Be Ready* initiative. Questions three through thirteen were designed using Callor, Betts, Carter, and Marczak's (1997) five-tiered approach to program evaluation.

Table 1

*Interview Questions: Teacher Participants*

| Question # | Question   | Research Questions |
|------------|--|--------------------|
| 1          | Why did you decide to enter the teaching profession?   |                    |
| 2          | What made you decide to participate in the <i>Read to Be Ready</i> training and summer camp experience?  |                    |
| 3          | Which new instructional practices (if any) did you learn as a result of your <i>Read to Be Ready</i> training?   | CQ, SQ4            |
| 4          | Explain how instruction in your classroom has changed as a result of participating in this training. If it has not changed, explain why you do not think it has. | CQ, SQ3, SQ4       |
| 5          | What type of supports do you feel would help you implement the <i>Read to Be Ready</i> instructional practices more effectively?                                 | SQ1                |
| 6          | How is the instructional environment in your school conducive to employing the <i>Read to Be Ready</i> practices?  | CQ, SQ2            |

| Question # | Question   | Research Questions     |
|------------|--|------------------------|
| 7          | What challenges might prevent you from replicating some of the instructional practices you used at <i>Read to Be Ready</i> summer camp into your own classroom?    | CQ, SQ1, SQ2, SQ3      |
| 8          | In what ways do you feel like your administration supports these instructional practices, if at all? How so?   | CQ, SQ2                |
| 9          | How does your district support these type of literacy practices? Provide examples.   | CQ, SQ1                |
| 10         | In what ways do you think the <i>Read to Be Ready</i> training and summer camp experience will help you perform better (or not) on your teacher evaluation rubric? | CQ, SQ3, SQ4           |
| 11         | Explain why you think this is either a good way or not a good way for students to learn literacy skills?   | CQ, SQ4                |
| 12         | How would you explain this method of teaching and learning to another colleague?   | CQ                     |
| 13         | What arguments would you use to convince another teacher this is a good way or not a good way to do literacy instruction?  | SQ3, SQ4               |
| 14         | Describe the conversations you have had with your colleagues concerning <i>Read to Be Ready</i> .  | CQ                     |
| 15         | Describe the conversations you have had with your administrators concerning <i>Read to Be Ready</i> .  | CQ, SQ1, SQ2           |
| 16         | Why do you think there is so much disparity in terms of teachers using or not using <i>Read to Be Ready</i> instructional practices?                               | CQ, SQ1, SQ2, SQ3, SQ4 |

Questions three and four allowed the participants to explain the benefits of attending the Read to Be Ready training. Teacher professional development has the potential to improve the quality of teacher instruction as well as student achievement outcomes (Bowne, Yoshikawa, & Snow, 2016; Deeney, 2016). If there were no perceived benefits from attending the *Read to Be Ready* training, participants also had the chance to voice their thoughts on why they felt that way. Using the five-tiered approach to program evaluation (Callor, Betts, Carter, & Marczak, 1997), question three also allowed the participant to define the need for the specialized literacy training.

Questions five through seven were meant to examine how appropriate supports might positively affect the implementation experiences of the participants. In particular, question six allowed the researcher to determine what type of instructional environment was in place for each of the elementary school subunits. If any of the schools appeared to have a less supportive instructional environment, this could have affected the implementation experience of those teachers in a way that was different from teachers who worked in a more supportive environment. When teachers feel supported, their autonomy and competence has been shown to increase to an extent that has been associated with positive student outcomes in reading (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Marshik, Ashton, & Algina, 2017; Taylor et al., 2017).

Questions five through seven were tier two questioning approaches and allowed the participants to assess their implementation of the Read to Be Ready strategies and examine individual accountability to their instructional methods (Callor, Betts, Carter, & Marczak, 1997). They also explored teachers' application of professional development learning and examined possible challenges of PD transfer to the classroom. The literature has revealed mixed results about what actually compels teachers to implement learning from professional development opportunities (Desimone et al., 2002; Gaitas & Martins, 2017; LeFevre, 2014).

Questions eight and nine were tier three approach questions that called for the participants to provide a full understanding of the program and give suggestions for possible refinement (Callor, Betts, Carter, & Marczak, 1997). These questions also supported the researcher's subquestions which sought to determine if there were site-specific factors that may have influenced the participants' abilities to implement the *Read to Be Ready* strategies in any degree.

Questions ten, eleven, and sixteen were tier four questioning approaches that helped the researcher determine how progress toward outcomes might be made (Callor, Betts, Carter, & Marczak, 1997). These tier four questions allowed participants to explain how they felt about what was happening with the *Read to Be Ready* program and describe its meaning to their lives. TDOE (2016) reported most of the 150 observations in early literacy classrooms revealed that teachers were not making progress toward the full rigor demanded by the academic standards.

Finally, questions twelve, thirteen, fourteen, and fifteen were considered tier five questioning approaches that evaluate program impact. This tier of questioning helps the researcher determine why a program might be having a greater impact on some people or in some places than in others (Callor, Betts, Carter, & Marczak, 1997). Teacher buy-in of professional development is a large contributing factor to personal implementation as well as to school-wide implementation (Barnett & Ceci, 2002; Coldwell, 2017; Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2013; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). These questions allowed participants to explain how they would describe the *Read to Be Ready* strategies to other colleagues and to recall practical conversations they have had that may help describe implementation behaviors and choices.

## **Document Analysis**

Documents can be a valuable tool for gathering information for a qualitative research study (Creswell, 2015). These documents can be either public or private, and for the purposes of this study, lesson plans (which were private) were collected from participants as well as *Read to Be Ready* training materials (which were public). Each teacher participant was asked to submit a unit-based lesson plan, that detailed reading instructional plans to be followed for an entire unit. The participants were asked to submit these documents prior to any observations that took place. Participants granted permission to use these documents in the study.

Once these documents were collected, they were reviewed to determine if they were accurate, complete, and useful for answering the questions presented in this study (Creswell, 2015). These documents helped corroborate and augment the evidence found in the observations and interviews (Yin, 2014). Lesson plans and training material documents were useful for answering the central research question of this study. Because of the type of data that was revealed from these documents, teachers were asked some follow-up questions in order to understand their thinking in terms of what they included or did not include in their reading unit lesson plans.

## **Data Analysis**

Analyzing data in a qualitative study requires the researcher to have a deep understanding of the process so that he or she can make sense of the collected texts and images and begin to build answers to the research questions (Creswell, 2015). Yin (2014) determined that the data analysis component of case studies is “one of the least developed aspects of doing case studies” (p. 133). Researchers who are unable to strategically evaluate their case study evidence can be quickly stalled (Yin, 2014), so a beginning helpful starting point is to “play with your data” (Yin,

2014, p. 135). First, the data was read multiple times to ensure that there was immersion in the details and to get a sense of it as a whole before attempting to divide it into parts (Agar, 1980). Data analysis was continued by searching for patterns or insights that seemed promising. All of the data was analyzed by hand.

In order to be able to see which patterns or insights were within my data, the information was put into arrays, data tables were created to examine the data, and a matrix of categories was made to see if the evidence fit into particular categories. Notes were written about what was observed in the data (Lembert, 2011; Yin, 2014), since those notes provided hints that helped conceptualize the data. These beginning steps and creations helped move forward towards formulating a “general analytic strategy” (Yin, 2014, p. 136).

After developing this general analytic strategy, a cycle was followed that involved re-looking at the research questions, the data, an interpretation of the data, and which provided an ability to draw some conclusions from the data. Because the research was guided by Bandura’s (1986) SCT, the analytic strategy used was to follow the theoretical propositions of SCT. In particular, data where participants focused on costs and benefits of behaviors or data that explained how implementation behaviors were or were not reinforced began to stand out. In addition, specific environment-related data that explained how school environment, in particular, reinforced certain behaviors or not was carefully examined. This strategy helped link the case study data to a theory of interest and provided the researcher with a sense of direction in analyzing the data (Yin, 2014).

Coding was the next step in the process. Coding was used to help segment information and provide descriptions for themes that emerged from the data (Saldaña, 2009). During this inductive process, data were narrowed into a few themes. Some data was kept as it provided

evidence for the themes and some data was discarded as it did not provide evidence for the themes (Creswell, 2015). This determination was made after bracketing off segments in the text and assigning a code or phrase that described the meaning of those segments. The coding appeared to address many different topics during the initial attempt to answer the research questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

The original coding was reviewed once more, to allow the opportunity to link ideas that went together, or to get rid of redundant codes, thereby, reducing the amount of codes that were assigned. Several like codes were combined to help create final themes. This made the data more manageable and allowed for better organization of the emerging themes.

A more precise technique that was used after sifting through and coding the data was explanation building. Explanation building is a type of pattern matching, except the goal was to analyze the data “by building an explanation about the case” (Yin, 2014, p. 147). For this case study, the researcher wanted to explain the experiences teachers had when implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices and find out what factors affected their implementation experiences. This explanation was presented in narrative form; therefore, all explanations were built to reflect significant propositions from SCT. The explanation of the case produced from this procedure was more compelling because it could be applied to other cases as part of a multiple-case study (Yin, 2014). Because this analytic technique is subject to researcher bias (Yin, 2014), all possible alternative explanations were continually examined.

Case studies require the researcher to create rich descriptions of the setting. As the data was analyzed, the developing themes were used to answer the research questions and to create a description of the central phenomenon in this study. It was important to provide detailed information about the site, the participants, and the events which occurred inside the classroom

(Creswell, 2015). Since this study took place across three different embedded units, it was necessary for a cross-unit synthesis to be conducted. A table was created to keep track of the data that emerged from each individual embedded unit, and then there was a cross check for any similarities or major differences that were found among the units (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). It was not necessary to create a visual that explained the findings.

During the analysis process, I was attentive to all the evidence and used as much evidence as possible to comprehensively cover the research questions. It was important to use all the data and leave no loose ends (Yin, 2014). Also, any rival explanations concerning implementation behaviors and experiences were addressed. To reduce threats to trustworthiness, my analysis focused solely on the implementation experiences of my participants and did not deviate from that important issue.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness addresses the credibility, dependability, and transferability of a study. Each of these factors were considered below in an effort to support that this study could be replicated in other settings. Studies that provide information on credibility, dependability, and transferability increase the overall credence of the researcher's work (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

#### **Credibility**

Credibility is one important way to establish the trustworthiness of a study because it concerns the ability of the researcher to link the study's findings with reality in order to provide support for those findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To ensure credibility, multiple types of data such as interviews, observations, and documents were analyzed. This will help corroborate the evidence by either supporting or contradicting the conclusions (Creswell, 2013). It also provided

enough weight of evidence to allow the findings to be persuasive. This process of triangulation helped provide a background to the information evidenced from the data and also allowed the opportunity to verify any details that were provided by participants (Shenton, 2004).

The opinion of others who are knowledgeable about this topic, were sought out to ensure that the case had been appropriately described. Creswell (2013) called this “consensual validation” (p. 246). Van Maanen (1979) recommended finding ways to “check out bits of information across informants” (p. 548). Instructional Facilitators who worked at these school sites and who were highly familiar with the work being done in literacy across the state, were asked to play a “devil’s advocate” role (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 263) and do an external check on the methods, meanings, and interpretations. Experts in the field, as well as committee members, also reviewed the work.

In addition, the interview questions used with participants were grounded in the literature and focused to address the research questions. The researcher provided participants with copies of the transcripts along with final conclusions to allow for member checks.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

The goal for designing a dependable study is ensuring that the procedures and methods are so well outlined, that if the study were to be repeated, similar outcomes would occur (Shenton, 2004). This can be complex for a case study design because the nature of using a case study design depends on understanding the present context and environment of the event, individuals, or activity within defined boundaries (Creswell, 2013). However, to address dependability, it was ensured that overlapping methods of data collection were used (such as interviews and classroom observations). The procedures for the study were also reported in great detail so that if necessary, the study could be replicated as closely as possible

at a future date. As these processes were planned, it was important to evaluate if they were the most effective processes for conducting this particular study.

Confirmability is defined as the researcher's responsibility to remain objective (Shenton, 2004). As much as possible, the researcher should work to ensure the study's findings "are the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher" (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). Towards this end, I professional background information was provided to explain why this topic was of interest to the researcher. All possible biases were reflexively bracketed up front. Also, participants were relied upon to complete member checks.

Qualitative research rests strongly upon the observations and discoveries made during the interview process; therefore, it is important that a researcher ensure they have correctly understood and interpreted what was said or done by the participants in his or her study (Creswell, 2013). All the teachers who participated in this study were asked to provide feedback on the preliminary data analysis. They were asked to tell the if the analysis had provided a credible and accurate picture of the message they were trying to convey. Any misinterpretations were corrected.

### **Transferability**

In qualitative research, transferability is like external validity concerns that would be associated with quantitative research. Since case study designs are technically restricted to describe the lessons learned from a study done on a particular group of participants, they are not necessarily intended to be generalized to a broader population. However, Bassey (1981) suggested that practitioners who believe they may have a similar situation could apply the findings to their own, separate case. Providing a rich description of the case being studied

should help practitioners better compare their position to that of the study. That is one way the researcher worked to establish a measure of transferability. In the methodology chapter, the boundaries of this study which should be considered before any transfer is made are clearly established. Maximum variation within the three sites in this study help with transferability.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Before any data was collected, IRB approval was officially received. Also, permission to perform the study was received from the district superintendent and from the principals of each elementary school where participants were being studied. Each teacher participant was asked to sign a form of consent.

To protect the identities of the participants and elementary schools who participated in this study, they were provided with pseudonyms. This helped ensure that teachers had the ability to speak freely, without fear of reprimand or creating a negative image of themselves. It also ensured that site specific information was protected.

The researcher did not conduct any research at her home school, which was also a *Read to Be Ready* site. This decision was made to avoid any issues of power play that might create friction in existing working relationships.

All data from the study was safely secured. Electronic files were protected with passwords and audio recordings and transcriptions were locked in drawer. Data will be kept for at least three years before it is destroyed; however, any transcript material will be destroyed six weeks after the publication to ensure privacy.

All emergent themes that are highlighted are guided by the research questions (Stake, 2014); though, due to the emergent nature of qualitative research, the researcher was open to any

unexpected findings that may have presented themselves. Any findings that may have otherwise emerged that could have caused harm to a participant's privacy or identity were not included.

Lastly, all participants took part in a closing conversation, where the study's findings were shared. This help provide closure to the participants. This closing conversation also helped support the credibility of the data and ensured that the overall findings of the study were considered to be trustworthy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **Summary**

This chapter has provided an overview of the methods which were used to conduct this embedded case study in order that a description could be developed to describe the experiences teachers had when implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices. It opened with a description of the case study design and outlined procedures for how the case site and participants were selected. Further, procedures for the collection of data were provided through multiple sources of evidence. Finally, this chapter closed with a discussion of the researcher's role, methods for ensuring trustworthiness, and plans for addressing any ethical considerations.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the data analysis. This chapter presents findings from the embedded case study where the researcher sought to describe the experiences of 12 elementary teachers who implemented *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in their classrooms, after using them at a summer literacy camp. A rich description of each of the participants is included in this chapter. In addition, themes that emerged from the data analysis are listed, and evidence from the data supporting these themes is provided. Results from observations, interviews, and document analysis were used to generate these themes. A presentation of themes is followed by a discussion on how the research questions have been answered.

### Participants

The group of participants for this study consisted of 12 elementary grades teachers who participated in the *Read to Be Ready* training and summer camp experiences. These 12 teachers worked within a single school district located in the southeastern part of Tennessee. Of the 12 participants, 11 were female, one was male, and 11 were Caucasian, and one was African American. At the time of this study, none of the participants were in their first three years of teaching; six had four to nine years' experience, four had 10 to 20 years' experience, and two had more than 20 years' experience. All of the participants had bachelor's degrees, though four had master's degrees and three had Ed.S. degrees. The average age of participants was 43.

A brief overview of each participant is listed below and contains information that came from the demographic form or from the semi-structured interviews. To protect the identities of participants in the study, each participant was given a pseudonym, and each school within the

district was given a false name. The assignment of participant pseudonyms was completely random and in no way connected to the participants' given names. The first 12 letters of the alphabet were written down a page, and each participant was randomly assigned to a letter and given a common name that begins with that letter.

### **Aaron**

Aaron is a high-energy teacher at Cherry St. Elementary who has over ten years' teaching experience. He has worked across grades kindergarten to fifth grade throughout his career. He began his teaching journey after switching from the psychology field, where he first became interested in learning how youth and children think. Moving from a psychiatric hospital into teaching, he now holds an Ed.S. degree with additional certifications in secondary English and ESL.

Aaron became a part of the *Read to Be Ready* summer camp program after a colleague sent out an email describing the opportunity. He thought it sounded fun, so he signed on to participate. At the time of his interview, he rated his commitment to using *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices as "very high."

### **Bianca**

Bianca is an upper grades ELA teacher at Thomas Elementary. She has worked most of her adult life in schools; however, only recently did she work towards full-time teacher certification. She finally got her degree after the age of 50 and has a bachelor's degree in elementary education and an additional certification in special education.

Bianca has worked two summers as a *Read to Be Ready* camp teacher because she sees the long-term benefits of working with kids and helping them want to become good readers. She said it helped her feel like she was having a true impact on the lives of students. At the time of

her interview, she rated her commitment to using *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in her own classroom as “high.”

### **Courtney**

Courtney is an African American primary grades teacher at Heathcliff Elementary. She has been teaching lower elementary grades for between four and nine years. She holds a bachelor’s degree with elementary grades certification. Courtney became a teacher because she discovered that teaching was a “mutual exchange” where both she and the students “can learn together daily.” She also loves to be around professional people.

*Read to Be Ready* training was appealing to her because she loves the experience of watching kids read and seeing their growth. She has worked two summers as a *Read to Be Ready* teacher and attended many trainings on the instructional practices. She rated her commitment to using those practices in her own classroom as “very high.”

### **Daphne**

Daphne is a teacher at Cherry St. Elementary with over ten years’ experience. She holds a master’s degree and has an additional certification in ESL. She has classroom experience that spans across grades kindergarten through fourth. Daphne said that she does not remember ever wanting to be anything but a teacher.

She attended the *Read to Be Ready* training because it was mandatory in order to take part in the summer camp experience, but she found that being able “to just have fun” with her students and “read and write and explore, when that is not something that [her] kids get to do all the time” was just “too good to pass up.” She said she enjoyed the *Read to Be Ready* training but felt much of it was things she had already learned. At the time of her interview, she rated her commitment to using *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in her classroom as “medium.”

**Ella**

Ella is a self-described “outdoorsy, curious” teacher from Thomas Elementary. She has over 20 years’ teaching experience, and she currently teaches upper grades elementary. Her bachelor’s degree is in elementary education. It was through her love of outdoors and working at camps that she became interested in teaching kids.

After years of teaching subjects other than ELA, she began to miss the pull that children’s literature had on her heart. Teaching reading to younger children was something she was missing, so she readily accepted the job of teaching at a *Read to Be Ready* summer camp. A self-described “life-long learner,” Ella rated her commitment to using *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in her own classroom as “very high.”

**Felicia**

Felicia is a primary grades teacher at Heathcliff Elementary with between ten and 20 years’ experience. She holds a bachelor’s degree in elementary education but did not obtain her teaching degree until later in her adult life. Felicia found herself drawn to teaching because as a child she struggled with school, and she felt a desire to help students who, like her, may find school a difficult place to be.

Originally, she did not plan to participate in *Read to Be Ready* training or camp, but after being approached by a school leader who said “she liked my teaching strategies and how I presented my lessons,” Felicia reconsidered and signed on. At the time of her interview, she rated her commitment to using *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in her own classroom as “high.”

**Grey**

Grey is a teacher who has experience in both elementary and high school settings. Currently, she teaches at Cherry St. Elementary, and she holds an Ed.S. degree with an additional certification in ESL. Having between four and nine years' experience, Grey said that she always wanted to be a teacher. "I just felt like it's important that we educate the world."

Working in a school with high socio-economic disadvantages, she reported an eagerness to participate in the *Read to Be Ready* training and camp as a way to combat summer slide that seemed prominent in her classroom year to year. She wanted to "target those lower children that needed the extra push in the summer that would normally sit at home and do nothing." Grey rated her commitment to using *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices as "medium."

**Heather**

Heather is an ELA teacher at Thomas Elementary. She has over ten years' experience working in upper elementary grades. She has a master's degree and a certification for grades kindergarten through eighth. Heather explained that she is not sure why she became a teacher – no one in her family did this kind of work nor did she have a specific teacher who influenced her. "It's really just the only job that I ever wanted to do."

Heather became interested in *Read to Be Ready* because of her interest in early intervention for struggling students. Since she enjoyed her first summer camp experience so much, she signed up for a second summer too. "I really just liked the philosophy behind it." Heather rated her commitment to using *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in her own classroom as "high."

**Isabel**

Isabel is a language arts teacher at Heathcliff Elementary. She has a master's degree in teaching and has been working as an educator between four and nine years. Isabel called her road to becoming a teacher a "different kind of teacher story" since she did not have great experiences in school and was not considered a successful student. When she had to leave her work in a school setting due to an unexpected family situation, that is when she realized how deeply she loved being a teacher and knew she had to do everything in her power to do so full-time. While journalism was her first love, she found teaching to be her true calling.

Isabel almost missed out on her chance to participate in the *Read to Be Ready* training and summer camp experience because she was not familiar with the initiative, but she said that going to training and working camp was "the best professional development" she had ever been a part of. She talked highly about the experience and how "powerful" it was to her. She considered her commitment to using *Read to Be Ready* practices as "high" and has stated that the use of these instructional practices may be "the only way" to get some students the support they need in foundational literacy skill-building.

**June**

June is a teacher at Cherry St. Elementary with over twenty years' experience in primary grades education. She holds an Ed.S. degree and has an additional certification in ESL. In college, she started off as a business major because she loved typing and playing secretary, but when she found no satisfaction in that line of work, she went back to school to get a teaching degree. "All the things I had done took me on my journey to teach. It was a surprise to me. It kind of found me."

Her love of books is what hooked her when it came to participating in the *Read to Be Ready* training and summer camp. She believes “you can teach anything with a book,” and she felt like *Read to Be Ready* “was a great way to reach kids.” June rated her current commitment to using *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in her own classroom as being “very high.”

### **Katie**

Katie is an upper elementary grades teacher with between four and nine years’ experience. She works at Thomas Elementary but started off her teaching career in an urban school located in another district. Her bachelor’s degree is in elementary education, though her heart was originally in secondary math. She tried to avoid pursuing an education degree because so many people in her family were educators, but she finally realized, “I really am being called to teach.”

It was the concept of fun that motivated her to participate in *Read to Be Ready* training and summer camp. A mentor at her school explained how fun it was, and she decided to do it – especially since it was not like traditional summer school. At the time of her interview, Katie rated her commitment to using *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices as “medium.”

### **Lila**

Lila is a kindergarten through fifth grade teacher who works at Heathcliff Elementary. She has between four and nine years’ experience and holds a master’s degree. Most of her immediate family members were educators, and she had several teachers that really impacted her life positively growing up. “My favorite people were teachers, and I don’t think that I would be the person that I am today if it weren’t for a couple of those teachers.”

Lila wanted to sign up at her school for the *Read to Be Ready* program the previous year but missed out, so when the second opportunity to get the training came open, she volunteered.

She admitted the grant money that goes towards salaries was a huge incentive, but she was also excited about the choice to teach things she did not normally teach and “help a couple of students.” At the time of her interview, Lila rated her commitment to *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices as “very high.”

## **Results**

Data from observations, interviews, and document analysis were reviewed several times and tables were created to further examine the data. Using these tables, along with handwritten memos that were taken during the analysis process, the researcher analyzed the data using the theoretical proposition of Social Cognitive Theory, looking for environment-related factors or participants’ focus on costs and benefits of implementation. The data was coded, and a narrative explanation of the case was generated by exploring themes that describe the experiences teachers had when implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices into their own classroom.

### **Theme Development**

Yin’s (2014) methodology for finding patterns or insights in case study data was closely followed by the researcher. The researcher began by reviewing the field notes from both sets of observations, tallying the practices used from the observation checklist, reading the 12 interview transcriptions, and analyzing the lesson plans that were received from each participant. After making careful notes about the observations and re-reading the data several times, the researcher began to create tables for each sub-unit school in the case study. These tables helped create an understanding of how initial categories were beginning to form.

Initially, codes were created for nearly 23 categories. Several codes did not appear frequently or did not have the weight of evidence from the data to fully support them as themes. In addition, many of the codes were relatable to one another, so they were able to be combined.

For example, the categories of trying new things, moving away from conventional wisdom, and stepping outside of comfort zones were consolidated into the single category and new theme of shift in mind-sets.

After consolidating and evaluating all the final categories, the coding process revealed seven common themes that were meaningful when trying to understand the participants' experiences with *Read to Be Ready* implementation. After conducting a cross-unit synthesis, these seven themes were evident across all three sub-unit schools in this embedded case study. The themes which emerged from the data were: (a) requires a shift in mind-set; (b) working within the confines of the system is difficult; (c) need for greater awareness and support; (d) funding and resources matter; (e) greater student engagement in classroom work; (f) reignited passion for literacy instruction; and (g) benefits outweigh the costs. Included in Table 2 is the relative frequency by which these themes appear in the data. This will be the order in which each theme is discussed in the subsequent sections.

Table 2

*Frequency of Themes in the Data Analysis*

| Theme                          | Frequency of Theme |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Mind Set Shifts                | 67                 |
| Confines of the System         | 80                 |
| Need for Awareness and Support | 51                 |
| Funding and Resources Matter   | 53                 |
| Noticeable Student Engagement  | 79                 |
| Reignited Passion for Literacy | 52                 |
| Benefits Outweigh the Costs    | 38                 |

**Requires a shift in mind-set.** Nine of the 12 participants voiced that using *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in the classroom required a shift in teacher mind-set. It seemed that many of the participants had originally viewed the *Read to Be Ready* training as training that was

only going to be relevant to their summer camp experience and discovered the need for a significant mind-set shift when they realized they needed or wanted to implement these practices in their own classrooms. There appeared to be a disconnect from the fact that the state developed *Read to Be Ready* as a state-wide network that was meant to train teachers in better literacy practices to thoughts that it was mostly applicable to the more well-known literacy summer camp experience. It was a big a-ha moment when the participants realized training for camp was never meant to be isolated. Courtney stated in her personal interview, “it made me more conscious of my teaching. I now try to be more aware of what I’m teaching, why I’m teaching, and how I’m teaching.”

When Daphne first attended the training she thought, “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks.” But then she said, “it just started refreshing my memory of past things I’ve learned and how I can use them too. I realized that the state didn’t want us just to focus on these practices for the camp.”

Aaron also said that while he already knew about many of the practices iterated at *Read to Be Ready* training, he stated, “it shifted my mind into making reading more of an active subject with students, when that’s not always something you think of as an active subject.” He spoke of how he began to understand the necessity of connecting texts to students’ experiences “and to their background knowledge as well,” and then, “bringing that together to create understanding of the literature.” The lesson plan he submitted included a read-aloud of a mentor text called *Memoirs of a Goldfish* and then provided opportunities for students to think about that text, discuss it with various partners, and ultimately write their own memoir. He named the writing connection activity *Put Yourself in a Book*. He mentioned that he began to see why this was a great way to grow students’ literacy skills. As he put it, “Humans are associative animals,

and so, we associate things with other things. This type of teaching is motivating for students, and when they associate something positive with the reading experience, it's not just laborious reading anymore." This was helpful to him to remember as he began shifting his mind towards a different way of thinking about helping his students obtain and grow literacy skills.

June said that her introduction to *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices was not necessarily new due to her many years of teaching experience, but she felt that after her colleagues spent two summers working to utilize the practices at camp they came to understand their thinking had to be shifted in order to embrace a different way of teaching.

I think our school has shifted to see how productive it is when children have time to read by themselves and with a partner. *Read to Be Ready* brought that back. I think before teachers thought they had to be lecturing the whole time and teach reading to the whole group, and I feel like now there is more of a freedom, letting go and showing children what they can look for in a book and letting them go do it. I feel like that's a big shift, and our school has really embraced that now.

She admitted, "It's hard to make that shift from teachers teaching up front by lecturing while students sit in their desks listening and doing worksheets. There is a whole other side, and we have become believers."

Isabel spoke of experiencing a similar shift in mindset. During her interview, she recalled a moment where she was doing an interactive read aloud with students, and she saw that her kids "were fully immersed in the text, and they were right there in the moment." She recalled the power in that moment, and she said that when she saw the looks on the faces of her students and them locked in on a book with her like that, "the structure and the pacing and the

exit ticket for the day were not front in center in my mind, even though conventional wisdom told me it should be.”

When Isabel was asked if structure and pacing are affected by the implementation of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices, she said they were. However, she felt like they should be affected because in her experience “this is the best way to do literacy instruction; it’s just a different way of thinking about education.” Isabel also said that since she has begun to implement these type of instructional practices with more fidelity that she has received the highest evaluation scores she has ever received.

What I do know is that my experience at *Read to Be Ready* training and summer camp shifted my views of what I thought was possible for my fourth grade classroom, and I have seen it on my observation score this year. These are the highest scores I have ever gotten. I think that is powerful.

Some of the participants admitted that conversations with colleagues which revolved around them encouraging the use of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices required them to be extra convincing. When it comes to re-thinking reading instructional practices, Lila stated that is a task she thinks “traditionally people would not view as fun.” She found herself saying, “this has been a really positive experience for me. I really enjoy the work I do now, and it isn’t hard for me. I tell them that it’s a new way of teaching where you are not limited.”

Other participants confessed that they were not always eager about implementing the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in their classrooms. Katie said before she got fully invested in using the *Ready to Be Ready* practices, she had a hard time getting her students to show progress in reading, even though she was “already doing a lot of small groups, a lot of hands-on, interactive things” that are associated with the initiative. She said it “literally took

shifting my brain to understand why I had to do read-alouds, build background knowledge for my students, and provide them with authentic experiences with high-quality texts.”

The field notes from lesson plans submitted by participants also supported June’s idea that the teachers who were moving toward implementation of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in their classrooms, were experiencing a mind-set shift when it came to planning. There was an intentional focus on avoiding whole group, lecture-style teaching. In addition, all 12 lesson plans were written to include the use of a mentor text throughout the lesson. These mentor texts were specifically chosen to help anchor the content learning in an authentic text. All 12 of the lesson plans participants gave me included a ten-minute mini-lesson, followed up by interactive read alouds, community discussion time, small group reading and writing time, and opportunities for students to have independent reading time. Participants included in their lesson plans routines for utilizing flexible reading groups and opportunities for scaffolding students’ background knowledge or extending their learning from a text.

However, observation data seemed to suggest that these practices are still not taking place daily in the classrooms. Every participant included interactive read alouds and small group reading in their observed lessons, but out of the 24 lessons observed, only 14 included time for shared reading, and only six allowed students to have at least 15 minutes of independent reading time, as recommended by *Read to Be Ready* guidelines.

**Working within the confines of the system is difficult.** While the data suggest that teachers did experience a mind-set shift as they worked to implement *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices, 12 out of 12 participants declared that working within the confines of the system of schooling made it difficult for them to fully move into the work, even when they were

committed to trying it. The most commonly referred to confinements were time, schedules, and the pressures of state testing.

Heather found that one of her big take-aways from *Read to Be Ready* training was the importance of providing time for students to just read.

Well, I learned that one of the big parts of teaching reading is giving kids time to read.

That's what we did in both years I worked summer camp. We had time, you know, for kids to just read. And we had time to go conference with them, and sit with them, and talk about what they were reading.

She mentioned several times that there did not seem to be enough time in a regular school day to devote for students to be able to read independently, due to other pressures.

At camp there just wasn't a lot of pressure to get to everything. In the classroom, it's hard to pick a small amount of things to focus on when you have a big amount of things to do, which is why we don't always take the time to do the things we know are good things to do.

She jokingly ended her interview by asking if the same people who came up with *Read to Be Ready* were the same people who wrote the state ELA standards. "Were they two different sets of people? Because to me, the practices they were championing through *Read to Be Ready* could not have been supported by the same people who wrote 75 reading standards for 180 school days."

Grey stated that her biggest challenge in replicating some of the instructional practices used at camp was time. "It's just having that time to drop everything and read. Giving students that time to just read for pleasure and not necessarily for work." She noted that reading should have a purpose at all times but suggested that the time crunch in a school day made it impossible

to allocate time for pleasure reading. “I feel like we’ve made kids feel like they only get to read in order to get something done. They no longer have the chance to pick up a book and read just to be reading.”

Felicia agreed in her interview that time was one of the biggest challenges she faced as well. “I think time is the biggest factor and challenge I face. If we only had more time, we could implement more – especially in the small reading groups.” *Read to Be Ready* emphasizes practices that teachers can use in their small, guided reading groups. Data from observations revealed that 24 out of the 24 lessons contained small group reading time; however, only 22 of them included a new book read and direct instruction on elements of fluency. Teachers included at least one tip on a reading strategy in 22 of these observed lessons as well. However, only 10 out of 24 small group instruction lessons contained any direct instruction on elements of comprehension, and only six out of 24 utilized flexible grouping strategies.

Felicia stated that small group reading time gave her the best chance to try to make progress with students.

I feel like it gives us the opportunity to help students who won’t otherwise receive extra help. Because once the school year starts, you are all in, and you don’t have many chances to try to catch up a child from where they may be lacking from the year before. Having them in a smaller group, giving them more hands-on experiences, allows them to strengthen those skills they are lacking in.

When asked to clarify why it appeared some participants were not taking advantage of making their small reading groups more flexible by design, she explained that in this school district, most of the reading groups are created by the school’s Instructional Facilitator, and not the classroom teacher, based on scores from reading benchmark tests. According to Felicia, it is

hard to make groups flexible since the Instructional Facilitator will usually “create a combination of students from amongst classrooms and have them meet at a designated time during the grade level’s literacy block.”

Katie said that her biggest challenge in trying to implement the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices was also time, though, she mentioned the pressures of state testing were what made her time feel very limited.

I don’t have enough time in the day to teach all the standards that we are required to teach. It’s a lot. It’s so much. And then, when you have everything else that gets thrown into your schedule, programs or drills or unexpected things that happen that throw your day off, it’s just really hard. We have so many standards that we have to teach in a certain time to get kids ready for testing, and testing is so much, that the important things in our kids’ lives are lacking – like a lot of our practices. I mean, I would love to do everything like we were taught in *Read to Be Ready* training, but it’s just not possible with the way that testing is pushed. It’s just not.

Daphne felt like the demographics of her school building and previous test scores from their low-performing students had affected some of her implementation decisions.

Because we are a target school, we are so worried constantly about teaching everything that is supposed to be taught, in the time that it is supposed to be taught, and within the schedule it is supposed to be taught.

She felt that time impacted her opportunities to make big improvements in her students’ literacy growth. “You’re just constantly worried that you don’t always have the freedom to stick with the teachable moments when they come up.”

When asked how she would explain this method of teaching and learning to another colleague, Daphne said,

I feel like this is what teaching should be daily. The opportunity to host small groups, connect texts to real-life experiences, build excitement about books, and not have the stress of we have to, we have to, we have to. We could take extra time when we needed, and we could skip things when we needed.

The observation checklist information revealed that most participants were taking time to create connections and scaffold background knowledge which are major components of interactive read alouds. All the lesson plans submitted included interactive read alouds as well. Out of the 24 classroom observations, there were 23 lessons where students had to create connections to other texts or to their lives based on the mentor text. There were 20 lessons in which teachers helped students scaffold background knowledge on the text's topic. Where time seemed to be a bigger influence was in long-term planning and in teachers taking the time to use think alouds to model their own metacognition. Only two participants included plans for multiple reads of their mentor text, and only one participant explained to students that they would be using this text for multiple purposes in future lessons. In six of the 24 observed lessons, teachers took time during the interactive read aloud to intentionally use think alouds as a means for modeling metacognition.

When Bianca was asked about this as a follow-up question during her interview, she said that she felt like “trying to commit to all the components of the practices in one lesson is impossible.” She explained that time affected her decisions, and she “had to decide which part of the practices would make the most sense in the lesson and create the biggest impact for my learners.”

Lila too talked of time and standards-based expectations as factors that challenge implementation experiences. She associated time with freedom; the more time a teacher felt they had, the more freedom they had to be intentional about their planning and practice.

Not that the *Read to Be Ready* practices don't align with the standards, it is just that there is so much that the teachers have to get to in a day that it sort of leaves little time for things like recess, let alone implementing newly-learned practices. I think that is where we run into a problem trying to transfer that learning.

Isabel reported that the demand of being an ELA teacher is “a mammoth task.” She talked about how difficult it can be to try to fit in all the things an ELA teacher is responsible for, like spelling, grammar, vocabulary, writing, reading, etc. “So, there is something in the scheduling and the timing and the lack of teacher support that really makes it very very challenging to implement some of these practices.” She said the implementation of these practices at camp was so much easier because of the freedom in scheduling. However, she also brought up the way that the way teachers are constantly pressured about measuring students' growth makes it difficult to teach the way she wanted.

At camp, you get to be the kind of teacher you think you're supposed to be. You get to read, you get to talk, you get to write, and you are not freaking out because your test scores are not going to be just so, or the people who look at the test scores are not going to understand how much growth this kid made.

In her interview, June spoke up about another piece of the big system that confined the way she considered using certain instructional practices, and that was assessment. The other participants referred to the end of the year standardized test required by the state, but June focused specifically on classroom assessments. “We check their comprehension, and that's

fabulous. But sometimes, we forget in our assessing how that information should be used to move students forward, not only in literacy skill-building, but in literacy confidence and motivation as well.” She talked about how being tied to curriculum based assessments or district-created assessments made it difficult to think about how her planning ties in to the results of these tests.

Our assessing tends to be about just getting hard data and teachers do not always think to evaluate their lesson plans against this data. We should be using this data to explain why we are teaching a certain way and choosing specific practices instead of just collecting the data and turning it over to parents or instructional coaches as a simple benchmark report.

**Need for greater awareness and support.** The three schools from the district being studied employ an Instructional Facilitator who has been second-handedly trained on *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices. The Instructional Facilitators themselves are not a part of the *Read to Be Ready* Coaching Network, but they do have a trainer from the district office who attends the trainings and brings the information back to them. The district’s objective is that the Instructional Facilitators will use this information to help coach their teachers in early literacy practices.

According to ten out of 12 participants, though, they lack the necessary training and support to appropriately implement these practices in their own classrooms. Courtney explained in her interview that the state provided solid support in the *Read to Be Ready* trainings that were offered to teachers who planned on teaching the summer camp. “All of the support systems were in place there for us, which is a big component with any successful program, the support.”

However, when asked about district level and building level support, Courtney said “there have been limited conversations about using or extending these literacy practices.”

Ella’s interview answers were similar to Courtney’s. She felt like the state grant for running the summer literacy camp was helpful as far as promoting practices and bringing in resources.

The *Read to Be Ready* grant has been so generous. I see great opportunities in my classroom to use the strategies from camp and the training. But if I hadn’t agreed to do camp, I’m not sure I would know about all these strategies. It makes me wonder what else is out there that I have not been exposed to yet.

Aaron noted that he believed there is some disparity in the use of these instructional practices due to general lack of knowledge and training.

I would think just knowledge of – just making teachers aware – raising their consciousness of these strategies. At the training in Knoxville, there was nothing that was taught to us in any of the breakout sessions that teachers would say, ‘Ew, I’m not doing to do that.’ They were all great strategies, so it is just awareness. Raising awareness. Once teachers are aware, I think they will jump on board.

Ten of the participants talked about a lack of specific administrator knowledge of the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices; though all 12 participants agreed that their administrators were supportive of them trying whatever they needed to try to make improvements in literacy growth for students. Cherry St. Elementary experienced an administrative change over the summer, which may have affected responses from participants at this school when asked about conversations they have had with administrators concerning the instructional practices. Aaron, who works there, said, “I have not really had any discussions.

Our administrators changed in the middle of the summer, and so, we did not have a debriefing time. Our new principal has not talked to me about any of it.”

Grey said that while her school and the system “are focused on literacy practices,” she did not know “how well teachers are trained on how to implement those practices.” She said she had not received specific coaching from her Instructional Facilitator on these *Read to Be Ready* practices, and she said, “I really have no idea how my principal feels about them.” In fact, out of the 12 participant interviews, eight of the responses indicated that administrators are not having any conversations with their staff members about *Read to Be Ready*.

The responses concerning district level support on *Ready to Be Ready* also indicated that this district has not placed a heavy emphasis on this particular type of literacy instruction, outside of being willing to host several summer camps. Heather said “there wasn’t much depth” involved with the conversations she had with her principal about *Read to Be Ready*, and when she was asked about district support, she felt it could be more explicit.

I feel like there is, within our district, a lot of autonomy with teachers. Like, it doesn’t matter if you do the workshop framework or not. It’s ok if you do; it’s ok if you don’t. It’s ok if you do interactive read alouds; it’s ok if you don’t. I feel like there is a lot of autonomy with that. I feel like our district supports those practices, but support as like if I were a new teacher to the district, would I know what an interactive read aloud is? No. Not if I was just relying on the district to tell me. I might know from my college classes or from my mentor teacher, but I don’t know that I would get that kind of support from the district.

Felicia mentioned that her district superintendent was supportive of the summer camps and applauded his efforts to get involved with the various sites.

I feel like our Director of Schools was very supportive. He came and visited us at camp several times. He read books to students. I feel like he was proud that we were granted the opportunity to run a *Read to Be Ready* camp.

But she too mentioned in her interview, “I don’t think I’ve ever had any conversations with my administrators about the *Read to Be Ready* practices themselves – only camp. And these conversations were practical and logistical mostly.” She said there was “not a district-wide push for an intentional use of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices,” but she has “had several people say, ‘I think we should do that. I would like that to happen. I think it would be a good thing.’”

Isabel said that she believed her district wanted to be supportive of helping teachers with literacy practices, and she thought they tried. “But what I don’t think they understand is that they give us conflicting curriculum and conflicting information.” While the state of Tennessee had promoted the *Read to Be Ready* initiative state-wide, Isabel said that her district “only spoke briefly about it” and “had a completely different way of looking at things.” She used the word “conflicting” five times in her interview when trying to explain that while district and administrative support were available, they were not consistent about spreading the same message about what good literacy instruction looks like.

Learning how to appropriately do interactive read alouds was a large part of *Read to Be Ready* coaching, and all 12 participants included these in both their classroom lessons and in the lesson plans they submitted. However, shared reading and independent reading with reading conferences were utilized far less frequently. These were components of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices that were also largely emphasized by the coaching network state-wide, but not necessarily in the trainings put on for teachers participating in summer camp. Out of the 24

classroom lessons observed, there were only 14 where students acted as though they were reading in a shared reading experience. Participants engaged in one-on-one instruction during an allotted, independent reading time in only five of the 24 observed lessons.

**Funding and resources matter.** One of the benefits schools that host *Read to Be Ready* summer camps receive is funding to provide access to rich sources of texts and materials to help provide students with authentic opportunities to improve their literacy skills. Not only do teachers receive materials, but grant money is also required to be used to provide every child who attends summer camp with at least eight high-quality texts that are sent home to become part of the child's personal library. The discrepancy in the amount of resources and funding provided to camp sites as compared to general classrooms was brought up by all 12 participants in their interviews.

During her interview, Ella bragged about the resources provided by *Read to Be Ready* grant funds.

I feel like one of the things teachers always struggle with is finding resources, and they are so generous with their resources. They made sure that teachers who worked the camp were sent home with valuable mentor texts to take back to their classrooms.

She cited this access to resources as one of the most meaningful take-backs from the summer camp experience.

I think the more tools that I have in my toolbox, the better equipped I am as a teacher in general, but if you want the learning to stick, you have to make it meaningful. Being able to provide our students with real authentic authors and real texts, has been an incredible benefit.

Bianca noted that one of the supports she could use in helping her better implement these instructional practices was “just more books.” When asked to expand on that, she talked about her wish “to be able to send home books with the kids – books to take home and keep forever.” Bianca explained that students getting practice at home with reading would be a great support to her, but due to the high cost of quality books, she limits what she is able to send home.

Heather also mentioned that funding for buying books could be a huge support for helping students’ literacy growth.

It all comes back to how much time students spend reading. At camp, we had so much money in our budget to send books home, which was amazing because a lot of my kids do not have books at home. It was nice to be able to send them home with books, so they could read them again and again and practice sight words again and again. They loved being able to keep these books and displayed a pride in ownership. We had daily reports from both parents and students about how much time they spent reading.

June felt that her district and colleagues were highly supportive of the instructional practices, but her hope was that they would shift to, “Let’s give tools to teachers to make them more effective.” June also mentioned that books are expensive, and though she said, “There’s not really an excuse when people say they don’t have enough books,” she felt as if “some teachers may use the excuse of lack of resources as a way to be resistant.”

Courtney cited her wish that teachers had better access to great books. She said the books teachers got from hosting camp

had rich texture, they are up-to-date, and they are diverse. The kids relate to them, and we have a variety of books that can refer to current situations that students might be in, and it makes a world of difference. They become engaged, and they begin to show more

interest and confidence in reading. I think more access to these kinds of texts for my students would be awesome.

Courtney was asked to clarify about needing more access to texts since she said that she was able to keep her books from camp. She explained that at the *Read to Be Ready* training that was meant to prepare teachers for working at summer camp, they were put in a huge room that was filled with high-quality books. Though they were able to buy several of these titles with their camp funding, she had just become aware of the variety of choices that were out there. It “broadened my awareness of the types of titles that were available to use in my classroom and created a desire for me to have access to books that my students would actually relate to.”

Isabel said that her instruction “was changed forever” when she realized the value of building high-quality texts sets to use during instruction. How to build these text-sets was listed as one of her top take-aways from *Read to Be Ready* training. According to her, she has to “beg, borrow, and steal” to get books into her classroom. She talked about how her experience at camp helped her get more practice with building quality text-sets and how she learned how important they can be for improving her instruction.

I get money so that I can buy materials for my classroom, but what I really need the most, is to be able to buy lots of quality books. If my main push is informational texts, and I’ve got all my reading for information standards, but I’m using like one Boston Tea Party book, I need to be able to put together a broader text set. And I don’t mean just five books because I have over 20 students in each class. I need to be able to put together high-quality text sets for these kids, and I don’t have a way to do that right now.

Field notes from the classroom observations included detailed notes about the environment of each classroom, including notes on the state of each participant’s classroom

library. All 12 participants had an area in their classrooms where students were able to independently access texts as needed. However, some reflections from the field notes stated, “many of these books look outdated and worn-out, like they were brought in from the teacher’s house or picked up from a used bookstore.” The choices on the shelves were limited in many ways. It was noted that there were more fiction book choices than nonfiction book choices. With the nonfiction text topics that were available, the majority of the titles indicated they were about either animals or weather. There was not a rich variety of nonfiction text titles available for students to pull. Also, for two of these schools to have such a diverse population, most of the books in the personal library were limited by not having multi-cultural characters or not addressing culturally diverse interests.

Katie said her biggest challenge in implementing everything she learned from training was funding. “We had a lot of funding for *Read to Be Ready* camp, which allowed us to send home over 20 books with kids. And teachers went home with books to add to their classroom libraries.” She explained that when funding for resources is lacking, “it’s kind of like we are just pulling from everywhere. When there’s limited resources, it is definitely hard to implement everything that the *Read to Be Ready* program prides itself on.”

Katie went on to say that funding was tied to other parts of building students’ literacy skills, besides just buying books or classroom resources. In her interview, she continually mentioned the field trips that students were able to take during summer camp to help build background knowledge about text topics and provide them with real-life experiences that help them better understand the world around them. She said it was vitally important that the camp funding helped pay for those experiences. “Students were able to have authentic experiences

with going on field trips and stuff, and I could watch them as they made these fantastic connections from the outside world to the texts we were reading.”

Aaron said in his interview that he had explained to colleagues in his building that a big part of helping students make gains in their reading is helping them to also understand the world around them and build interest.

I explained it as the need to connect activities to reading. You find this great source of literature, and it can be anything that would be exciting to you, and then you think about how can I create fun activities for the kids that are then going to reinforce the reading and get them to read about topics independently.

He said that taking field trips, connecting texts to students’ experiences, and “taking the extra time to do all those projects and field trips and things that the kids loved” was simply a part of building enjoyment for reading and leading students to become life-long readers.

Aaron’s colleague Daphne also spoke about the importance of having funding for providing students with real life experiences. Her school population consists of mostly students who are economically disadvantaged or come from minority backgrounds.

Those real life experiences, like the trips we got to go on, were incredible because kids from our side of the tracks don’t often experience those things. And so, the constant getting on a bus and going and seeing that there were things outside our classroom walls was, I think, super powerful.

She felt like the instructional practices promoted by *Read to Be Ready*, combined with the real-life experiences students had that connected to texts, was a benefit for students. “Like all of that, it was just so good for our population of kids. It built vocabulary for them and a purpose and language for reading.”

Grey's interview supported the theme of the importance of funding and resources as well. She said that she had been implementing the instructional practices with intention; however, some of the real-life experiences she was able to provide for students during summer camp were much harder to try in a general classroom.

At camp, we did more hands-on, more experimental activities that connected with texts, in order to help with background knowledge. Whereas in the regular classroom, it costs a lot of money to do all that stuff. At camp you had funding provided and fewer children, so it was a lot more affordable. When you have a classroom of 20-25 students, it becomes very hefty on the pocket.

**Noticeable improvement in student engagement.** Katie said in her interview that not only have *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices helped her to perform better on her teacher evaluation rubric, but she had noticed that “the *Read to Be Ready* program has reinforced my efforts to focus on classroom community and build relationships with my students.” She talked about how rethinking literacy instruction had helped her engage more students than before. Kate said, “I think of this type of instruction as fun and nontraditional, where kids are able to have authentic experiences with rigorous texts in a fun, safe environment with one another.” She talked about how she had approached her small group reading time in a different manner since being trained on guided reading practices and how she intentionally created community for each of her small reading groups by hosting morning community meetings that include a letter that explains to each group what skills they will be focusing on for the day. This practice was also observed on both occasions that I had to visit Katie's classroom.

Courtney stated in her interview that the growth she had seen from students this school year is what motivated her to continue using *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices.

I love the experience of watching kids read. I love watching the growth. I love the program itself because of the values it sets forth for kids and the new excitement for books I've witnessed. It's what motivates me to continue.

She felt like being trained on these instructional practices had helped her engage more students in text. Courtney explained that she used to just read a book out loud and ask a few questions about it and move on. The difference in her approach now was,

I learned there needs to be a lot of dialogue among the students about texts. We don't just read one book and move on anymore. We read about it, think about it, talk about it, and write about it. That high-quality text becomes our focus and we share our experiences with it, pulling out details, and talking and writing with each other. It's a good way to pull the students into your teaching and allow yourself to enter their world with the learning exchange.

Lila said the *Read to Be Ready* training helped her understand a goal she needed to have was making learning how to read a more exciting, interesting, and relevant process for her students. "And how do you do that? It's through these practices." She said her biggest take-away had been "seeing the kids become more invested in reading and writing." Lila recalled one of her recent lessons in which one of her struggling students said, "I can't read that," and another one of her students responded, "Well, you can't read that yet. But this is a really good book, and I will help you get started on it." She said that even though she felt like implementing these practices had pushed her to "go the extra mile," she agreed that "This is something I can do, and I think that implementing these practices is good for the kids."

Bianca said that her experience in teaching summer camp is what convinced her to try the practices in her own room because she was "amazed by how engaged the kids were in learning."

When she talked about administrative support during her interview, she told a story about getting observed by her principal during a literacy block. “My principal commented on how engaged my students were during the interactive read aloud and how much they seemed to enjoy what they were doing. She noticed an increased level of joy about reading.” Bianca said that when she was intentional about planning and using these practices with consistency, her literacy lessons “were no longer a battle.”

Ella said her favorite thing about *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices was “how it reinforced the connection between reading and writing.” She described how her students have been using mentor texts in her classroom to become better writers as well as readers, and recounted a lesson in which students were using the structure of a mentor text to create an original book with a similar structure. Ella said that having that new understanding of the purpose of using mentor texts “was really an important connection for my teaching and has inspired a lot of creativity in my classroom.” In fact, most of Ella’s interview highlighted her enthusiasm about the renewed excitement she had seen in students as they transitioned from readers to writers. “What I have seen from kids, whether they are kindergarteners or fifth graders, is a lot of excitement about writing when they are inspired by texts that bring writing to life.” She said that she has explained to colleagues that “*Read to Be Ready* is about using authentic texts as mentor texts to inspire both reading and writing in your highest level readers and your reluctant readers.” She testified that through trying these practices, she “could see the excitement” like she had not seen in many years of her teaching.

Heather admitted that she has had to find a balance between student enjoyment and making sure she is using the instructional practices as intended. This was the second year she had been trying these practices in her classroom, and she mentioned that her first attempt at

incorporating them might have “lacked some of the rigor that I felt like those kids needed.” She tried to clarify by explaining that she had a large population of students who came to her who were behind in their reading proficiency. She said that she had to readjust her perspective and evaluate her teaching mission by asking,

Are they gaining any ground from what we are doing? They are having fun, and they want to come to my class, and they are reading good books and learning a few things, but are they getting better at the actual practice of reading?

When she could not answer with complete certainty, she told me that realization led her to do a more comprehensive study of the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices and “not just focus on the fun parts and experiences but focus on understanding why each of them is important in leading students to have strong, foundational literacy skills.” Heather said that her second year of implementation resulted in even more student engagement and improvement.

Felicia said that she noticed improvement in her ability to ask higher-order thinking questions related to texts and to lead students to have better comprehension skills. She thought this improvement in her questioning had led to increased student understanding of texts in her classroom.

I have learned how to ask better questions. How to get students to think deeper and go further in their thinking than just the shallow answer of yes or no or what do you think. Particularly in the area of seeing students use text evidence to support their thinking have I noticed a great improvement.

She said that the training had made her a “sharper” teacher of early literacy. She reported that she came away from her classroom “with a very positive outlook, like I have really made some progress and helped some kids who otherwise wouldn’t have gotten that level of help.”

That was her first goal in becoming a teacher, to help students who like herself struggled in school, so she felt like she “had come full circle with [her] life goals and teaching goals.”

June raved about a little girl whom people at Cherry St. Elementary called “the superstar” of *Read to Be Ready*. She was delighted to share the story of this little girl who came to them severely behind in her reading skills.

Recently, I had a conversation about one of the little girls from camp. We were talking about how she was taking a journal on the school bus with her and was writing notes to a teacher. She was using this journal as a form of communication and had even invented a secret code. We could not believe that she was able to write so well, since she had come to us so far behind in reading. But after being taught in classrooms where these instructional practices are being implemented, she blossomed and bloomed so much. This was a very positive experience for her, and teachers could not stop talking about how much they had seen this child grow.

An evaluation of the lesson plans revealed that the participants in this district are given 60 to 90-minute literacy blocks during each school day. Breaking apart the various plans, there was a shift from teacher-centered instruction to more student-centered instruction. For example, no lesson plan had over 20 minutes of teacher-talk time included. Lesson plans included at least 30 minutes of small group reading time and at least 10 minutes of independent or partner reading time (not quite the 15 minutes recommended by *Read to Be Ready*). There was also evidence that participants were careful to include opportunities for students to either talk about or write about the texts they had been reading in class. There was an average of 20 minutes included in the daily lesson plans to allow students to talk or write about their reading.

Notes from classroom observations also corroborated this theme of student engagement. From the participant classroom visits, there are detailed notes about student engagement and interaction. There were structures in place in 10 out of the 12 classrooms for students to have conversations about texts. Some of these structures included talking to a shoulder partner, finding peanut butter and jelly partners, and using a clock to find their time partner. Out of 24 observations, students wrote responses to texts 18 times, though in all 12 participant classrooms, there was evidence of student work displayed in the room that showed students have practiced writing responses to texts they have read during the year. Nine of the participants had questions pre-marked on post-it notes stuck in the book they were using for interactive read alouds to help guide students' thinking and discussion on texts. Vocabulary previewing was done in 16 out of the 24 classroom visits to help introduce unfamiliar words that might inhibit students' full understanding of the text being read.

**Reignited passion for literacy instruction.** This theme was an unexpected theme that emerged from the data analysis. It does not necessarily correspond to the research questions, but it was a significant finding that came out during the research process. The teachers in this study who participated in *Read to Be Ready* trainings and the summer camp experience confessed to having a reignited passion for literacy instruction. Many participants mentioned that teaching literacy had become rote and felt restrictive due to curriculum and state-standards demands, and they had unknowingly become overwhelmed by these demands and the seeming lack of success as indicated by low standardized testing scores.

On the demographic form, participants rated their commitment to using *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices, with the average answer being a 4, or "high." No participant ranked their commitment less than a 3, or "medium." The average rating for frequency of use of the *Read to*

*Be Ready* instructional practices was a 3, “medium.” The average value ranking given to *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices was a 4, or “high.” These responses indicated that participants highly valued the practices, were committed to using them, and used them somewhat frequently.

June said that her introduction to *Read to Be Ready* affirmed a lot of the things she was doing in her classroom but also brought a new freedom to her teaching approach.

It refreshed and renewed some of the teaching styles that I had let go of a little bit because of my obsession with the standards and feeling overwhelmed. It took me back to this solid foundation where I needed to start. I thought it was really good for getting me back to that and helping students get back to books.

She said that these practices “have become the heart of my teaching.” June recounted a story in which she was working with a colleague who she felt like “had lost her teacher heart or spirit.” Although she said she understood how the pressures of teaching had gotten to her, she was very surprised when this teacher signed on to do the training and camp since she did not consider this teacher as someone willing to change or try new things. June said a couple of weeks after camp, during the first month of school, she walked by this colleague’s door.

I saw her regained teacher voice and teacher smile. I walked by and stopped because this was a teacher who I had not heard talk with great joy like that in a while. She had this love in her voice. That joy was evident as she was reading a good book to her students.

June attributed this teacher’s change to the professional development and opportunity to reconnect with students over books during the summer.

Aaron said that his training and camp experiences have brought him a great excitement when he thinks about teaching reading to students.

I'm so excited now about trying new things for reading or writing, and I want to jump on the chance to try something new. And I'm willing to support, fully support, any of my colleagues who want to try out these strategies or new ways of teaching reading.

He stated that the spirit of summer camp really influenced his and his colleagues' newfound enthusiasm for growing students' literacy skills. "The whole time of camp, it was all smiles and laughter. And so, when I think back to camp, and reading those books with students, I positively associate it with a great time."

Daphne talked about the reignited passion for collaboration that sprouted as a result of teaching summer literacy camp with some of her coworkers.

The bubble of teachers I work with now are the same bubble of teachers I taught camp with. We now have this ongoing conversation about the stuff we did and how we can bring that back to the classroom and do what is best for our kids.

She talked about how much fun she had when her team did a reading unit with a mentor text called *The Worm* and students began reading other texts about worms and investigating and exploring things about worms. She recounted a story in which a few girls in her group got "completely grossed out" by the worm unit and how her group of camp teachers "laughed and had such a blast watching students get engaged and get excited. It made us just as excited and engaged in the learning too."

Katie spoke of how she was so excited after summer camp that she brought back some of her learning to specials teachers in her school to see if she could get them on board with trying some of the instructional practices too. She said that she has "had several conversations with her Instructional Facilitator on how to promote this love of reading across the school" and that she has worked with "the PE teacher and other specials teachers to help out the regular education

classrooms too.” She said that when she worked in the summer to get “kids to have those fun, authentic experiences, I realized that I was having more fun teaching than I had in a long time.”

Lila said that teaching summer camp was one of the greatest moments in her professional life. “It reignited my love for teaching kids to read.” She further went on to say that “the environment of her school” has influenced her ability to keep up the positive outlook, and all the conversations that she has with her colleagues about *Read to Be Ready* and early literacy instructional practices “have been extremely positive.”

**Benefits outweigh the costs.** All 12 participants in this study agreed that the potential benefits that came along with implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices outweighed the potential costs, relative to time, cognitive demands, and physical demands. However, there was direct acknowledgement that these costs do impede the fidelity with which participants were able to follow through on using these practices in the exact manner that they did in summer camp after their initial training on them. When asked if the benefits were worth battling the costs, all 12 participants said yes.

Isabel said that even though lack of time and inconsistent schedules sometimes interfere with her teaching,

If the practices are implemented consistently, and if implementation is wide-spread, student learning is positively affected. *Read to Be Ready* requires teachers to put high-quality texts (not computer screens) in the hands of students. When we have the opportunity to do interactive read alouds, we can provide the necessary scaffolding for our students who come in with major reading gaps. And the more time, we spend in text, the more thoughtful and fruitful discussion we get from students, which helps us better identify what our students actually know and where they might need remediation.

Felicia admitted that weighing the pros and cons of implementation was one of her biggest battles when it came to instruction.

That is honestly my struggle. Trying to find the time to make the extra planning for it and to fit it all in during my literacy block. But it is worth it. These practices are far more beneficial for student growth than what I was doing. I have seen repeated benefits. Once I learned how to incorporate the components into my planning, it just became second nature for me to use them.

Lila was adamant that the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices should be used despite the costs involved. She said that she has encouraged many colleagues to reconsider their approach to literacy instruction since she has seen the benefits of using them. Particularly, she cited student renewed student interest in reading as one of her biggest motivators. She also credited student growth in foundational literacy skills as the factor that helped her see that implementation of the practices was worth it for her. She said,

I believe in using these practices, even though the costs are high because implementing alternative approaches to learning can only enhance knowledge, habits, and skills. This is true whether the student is a struggling reader or an advanced one.

Courtney said that she saw the most benefit in her small group reading instruction and has felt the gains strongly in that setting. In order to incorporate the guided reading practices learned from the *Read to Be Ready* training, Courtney had to “move away from” the small group reading program supported by her district. She felt like that was a scary decision and one she might face repercussions from. However, she stated that it was worth it for her to try.

It allows for small group instruction that is focused on a strategy to explore and implement. In the small group setting, students can participate without intimidation. The

students are grouped so that their needs are addressed. The instruction time is intense with multiple ways to let students grapple with texts. Students are reading, discussing, writing, thinking, and completing tasks with the explicit support of the teacher. It is a very inclusive model for every student.

### **Research Question Responses**

The following section provides answers to the central research question and the four subquestions that this study sought to address. For each question response, the comprehensive data as well as the themes developed in the previous section were analyzed. Participant quotes are used to support the responses for the research questions.

**CQ: What are the experiences teachers have when implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in their general classroom settings?** Five of the six themes developed in this chapter are directly related to the central research question: requires a shift in mind set, working within the confines of the system is difficult, there is a need for greater awareness and support, funding and resources matter, and noticeable improvement in student engagement.

Listening to participants describe their overall experiences implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices, there was a sense of tempered excitement. Every one of the participants indicated a level of continued commitment to using the practices, even though they admitted it was almost impossible to maintain full fidelity to the training they had received.

Participants were adamant that implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices required a shift in mind-set in order to get started. While at least three participants said they were highly familiar with these practices before training, most of the participants only had a general familiarity with them before receiving the in-depth training. Isabel said that *Read to Be Ready* training “shifted [her] views” of what she thought she could accomplish with her students,

and so far, she had seen “a significant change” in the level of interest from her students and in their attitudes about coming to ELA class.

While trying to implement learning from their professional development opportunity, all of the participants admitted that the way that schooling was organized in general, contributed to some difficulties in implementing their new learning the way they had hoped. Scheduling was the most often brought up issue that confined participants’ abilities to implement the strategies as planned. Classroom observations revealed that time did indeed obstruct some of what teachers had planned for lessons, and the varying times in teachers’ ELA blocks across the three schools studied did appear to be a factor in what could be accomplished in a single lesson.

In addition to time, money was also frequently mentioned by participants as a stumbling block to their implementation practices. In particular, money to buy books for students to practice reading with at home and money to buy books for building high-quality text sets were mentioned as needs. Lila said,

I only receive \$200 a year for buying supplies for my class. That limited money makes it difficult to purchase books for the classroom library since they are so expensive. And since I can buy so many other smaller things like paper and pencils, which are always needed in my room, with that money, I’ll admit it usually goes towards that instead.

Teachers who worked in highly supportive environments were more likely to be positive about their implementation experiences. Specifically, participants who had supportive administrators felt a freedom to continue using these practices. However, it should be noted, that while most participants felt like their administrators supported them using *Read to Be Ready* practices, few of them felt like their principals could actually identify exactly what those practices were – especially when it came to observations. June recounted how when she was

planning for her evaluation she thought to herself, “When we look at our evaluation rubric, we need to be able to explain why we are teaching this, why this is important, and how it relates to the real world.” She wanted all her decisions to be clear for her principal.

This was especially important since participants were worried about their scores on the TEAM evaluation rubric, which is the evaluation rubric used in this district to determine teacher effectiveness. While the participants answered question ten in the affirmative, that they did believe using these instructional practices would help them on their evaluation, their actual follow up responses indicated that would be possible only if their administrators understood the “look fors” and “the why” behind using these practices. Ella said “when teacher evaluation time comes around then already in my classroom, I’ll have created deeper experiences for my kids and hopefully be able to hit those points on the rubric more successfully.” However, Daphne said she worried about “the expectations from their administrators. That they expect kids to be reading on their own or they expect them to use this certain resource they have bought.” She stated, “I just don’t know that they see the whole picture sometimes.” Similar responses from participants indicated that administrator awareness of the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices would help them feel more comfortable implementing them, especially since classroom performance is tied to an individual level of effectiveness score.

While participants in this study had no trouble identifying perceived costs of implementing the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices, all 12 of them stated that they believed the perceived benefits to implementation outweighed the perceived costs. It appeared that the participants had a perception of improved student engagement, improved student skills in reading, and improved student motivation and confidence about reading, which encouraged them to have more buy-in for using the instructional practices more regularly. Overall, there were

some challenges that came along with the implementation of the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices, but nothing that participants felt were too overwhelming when compared to the positive outcomes students were experiencing.

**SQ1: What are the supports teachers identify as necessary in the implementation process?** The top four supports teachers identified as necessary in helping them implement *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices were funding, having access to resources, greater awareness and training about the practices, and having an additional person in the room to help with small groups. Bianca said that she felt like her small group practices could improve if she had another person in her room “to help her plan and prepare activities for these groups and to help run more small group opportunities.” She talked about how her student teacher in the previous year had been able her “accomplish more with small groups in less time” and found the extra personnel support to “be very valuable when trying to implement these practices.” Felicia said that “knowing that the paraprofessionals in our school are being trained on *Read to Be Ready* practices and on how to help assist us in literacy instruction” had been a great support because “we need all hands on deck sometimes to try to implement these best practices.”

Ella stated that *Read to Be Ready* summer camp training introduced her “to a lot of great, rich texts,” but she felt “like one of the things we always ask for are resources.” She mentioned that some of the disparity that might come from those trying to implement the practices after using them at summer literacy camp and those not using them, might stem from a lack of appropriate materials. “I wonder if they were sent back to their classrooms with the right materials? It’s hard to plan for high-quality literacy instruction when you feel like you don’t have the right materials.”

Courtney talked about the impact that community involvement and funding had on the summer camp and how that was much harder to transfer to the everyday life of regular classroom instruction. “We had considerable funding from community organizations and continual community involvement.” She talked about how the money from the community donations helped with buying expensive materials for experiments or activities that would help students extend their learning from texts. “When you are in the classroom, you have a limited budget for buying books, and there is much less community willingness to fund supplies.”

Katie mentioned funding 14 different times in her interview. She repeatedly stated that funding was the number one support she would need to better implement these instructional practices. She wished for money for better texts for interactive read alouds, more big books that could be used for shared reading activities, a better, more updated classroom library that students could pull books from, and more relevant books with current topics to use during small group reading time. She also said additional funding would help her “pull in different activities to connect to literacy. I have been able to do that some, especially when I have an extra dollar, but I hate that I can’t do it more often.”

Lila said that the *Read to Be Ready* training she attended in Knoxville “was the best training and professional development” she had ever been to. She felt like further training on these practices would help not only her instruction, but the literacy instruction occurring across her school. “I would love it if some of the PD we received at our school could be from the people who trained us in Knoxville. We all felt, the teachers who had been teaching five to ten years and the teachers who had been teaching over 20 years, that we got some of the best training ever.” She said that better awareness and training on these instructional practices “could significantly improve the literacy proficiency we are seeing in our students.”

**SQ2: What school specific environmental factors influence teachers' choice regarding the implementation of *Read to Be Ready* practices?** There were five school specific environmental factors that appeared to influence teachers' choice regarding the implementation of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices. These factors were: administrative support, school demographics, colleagues' attitudes, master scheduling, and school-level coaching. Though all the participants said their administrators were supportive of using any literacy practices they felt were effective, very few were able to say that they have had thorough conversations with their administrators regarding what type of practices they use – even during evaluation post-conferences. Aaron and Felicia both said they have had no discussions with their administrators concerning *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices. June said that she felt as if some of the practices would not be immediately evident to administrators who had not been trained on them. “Sitting and reading and having a conversation with kids about a book is something I don't feel like teachers feel like they can do with the worry that an administrator will just walk in at any time. It doesn't seem like instruction, even though you are doing so much teaching in that. I'm just not sure that's what administrators know to look for.” She stated that stronger administrative awareness and support on the practices could “give teachers a freedom to use the practices that they may not normally feel they have.” Across all three schools, administrative support was a factor that was mentioned as an influence on implementation choice.

The demographics of the schools also appeared to be a factor that determined implementation behaviors. The four participants from Cherry St. Elementary, which is the elementary school in this study with the most diverse population and highest level of socio-economic disadvantage, all felt like their school demographics made them more determined to

implement the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices with fidelity. In her interview, Daphne said, “This is the kind of literacy teaching our kids deserve.” June, Aaron, and Grey particularly mentioned the socioeconomic disadvantages of students in their school and how that motivated them to try new practices.

Heather mentioned how the majority of students in her classroom do not have parents who will willingly sit at home and read carefully with their children. She said,

I have parents who will just tell their kids to go sit and read for ten minutes over on the couch, and that’s not going to do as much good for them as talking about the book and actually reading pages together. That is why I have been determined to include time for specific dialogue about books in my classroom.

Courtney was concerned about the ethnic makeup of the students in her room and felt like “understanding their need for access to texts with characters they can relate to” has motivated her to encourage implementing *Read to Be Ready* practices. She told a story about a Hispanic student in her class who was having a conversation with her about *Coco*, the movie. This student got excited when Courtney was able to go to her shelf and pull off a book called *Miguel and the Grand Harmony*, which is a book based off the film *Coco*.

I discovered the *Miguel* book at *Read to Be Ready* training. It drew my attention because of the Hispanic characters and the tie into some Hispanic heritage and the big celebration, The Day of the Dead. Since my class is becoming increasingly diverse, especially with more students in the Hispanic population, I knew I had to have this book. Seeing how important it is for all my students to connect to high-quality texts, with characters that look and sound like them, I just feel like my training from *Read to Be Ready* has taught me how to do that through book selection and classroom practices.

Isabel said that at her school, “kids come to us with these great big gaps. They don’t have the background knowledge or kinds of experiences they need in order to access higher level material.” She said that specific understanding she had about the students in her building and what major gaps they had in their reading proficiency encouraged her to transfer what she learned at training and summer camp into her own classroom practice. “My school has a very different environment from other schools in the district and my students have greater needs than the average student. That’s why I’m willing to try whatever I need to make sure these gaps are filled.”

The attitudes of colleagues within a specific building was also mentioned in ten of the participants’ interviews when it came to factors that influenced implementation choices. Grey talked encouragingly about her team of teachers and how they had begun co-planning and co-teaching together so much better after working as a team at summer camp. “We are able to focus on each other’s strengths as teachers, and that has played a big piece in helping us progress in our teaching and become better teachers of reading.” She said that her colleagues were able to spread the message of *Read to Be Ready*, which helped “create a common mission. We have been able to focus on what we really want to do and on what the students need most. And then we work together to find ways to make sure we are meeting those needs.” Grey noticed that this level of improved teamwork and the collegial attitudes have helped her teachers “build a culture of reflective practice.”

Bianca felt like her school was “very conducive to employing *Read to Be Ready* practices” because of the attitudes of her principal and the other teachers in her building. “I work at a school where my principal is always willing for us to try whatever we need to try, and my coworkers are on board to try anything they believe will benefit students.” She said the

collaborative attitude of the teachers in her building made planning for literacy lessons more exciting and motivated her to push through her self-made boundaries. “I honestly believe that is what helped me keep going probably more than anything.”

Ella spoke about coming back to a new school year after completing her time at summer camp. She said that she was able to distribute a lot of new books and materials to her colleagues to help them get started with implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices if they wanted to.

In my building, we have had a lot of good conversations about the opportunities this program has brought to our students. It was fun to come back to school with these great new texts, distribute them to other colleagues, and provide teachers with examples of the activities we had done. There was a lot of excitement across our school.

Ella said that having colleagues with willing attitudes has helped her continue to implement the practices because she gets asked many questions and has people who want to “use her experience as a resource.”

The master schedules at each school that participated in this study are designed at the school level, so none of the schools had the same master schedule; however, schedules and timing were factors that participants from across schools mentioned as influencing their choice when it came to implementing certain instructional practices. June said, “It’s all about scheduling. It’s hard when you’re having to keep a lunch schedule and a specials schedule, and the more people you have involved in scheduling, the less time it seems you have to teach.” She said they had more freedom at camp with creating schedules since literacy instruction was their only focus. She also told a story about how students at camp carried around little backpacks with

journals in them to “make every moment an educational moment,” but she said it was unrealistic to think this could happen in a regular school day.

Heather said that she re-evaluated the way she designated the time given to her during her literacy block. She mentioned that she was “limited” by the master schedule, since the time for teaching reading was carved out for her, but that she had “been more intentional about giving students time to read and learning how to adjust my time so that I can make room for conferencing with my students about what they read.” She said that giving students time to read and creating time to have dialogue with them about their reading had helped her see individual growth in students, and so she “has learned to use any flex time in my schedule” to make that happen.

Something unique about the district that participated in this study is that each elementary school had its own building level Instructional Facilitator who worked with teachers and coached them on best practices. School level coaching support on the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices was seen as a school-specific factor that influenced implementation decisions. The state’s *Read to Be Ready* Coaching Network was set up so that school coaches could become familiar with the instructional practices and re-deliver the training to their staff. This district was not an official part of that coaching network, so the Instructional Facilitators did not receive that hands-on state training; yet, they did have a central office staff member who regularly attended the coaching meetings and trained the Instructional Facilitators over the material.

Katie said her willingness to continue implementing what she learned from *Read to Be Ready* training was largely influenced by her Instructional Facilitator. “She is a huge supporter of *Read to Be Ready* practices, and she pushes them.” Katie said that her Instructional Facilitator was willing to take time to not only observe her using the practices but to “come in and model

them” and show her “how to improve interactive read alouds and shared reading experiences for students.” She said that the time spent with her Instructional Facilitator talking about the practices and growing in her understanding of them had helped her realize “why they are evidence-based practices and why they are so foundational for our students.” Katie said that ongoing support with her building level coach had “meant the world” to her.

Bianca also said that her Instructional Facilitator’s support with the instructional practices had been a key factor in helping her choose to use them more frequently.

If it weren’t for her tips and support, it may be harder to come up with ideas for starter units. She has not only done model lessons for me, but she has connected me to resources at the state-level, where I am able to get ideas for mentor texts and see how other teachers align the use of these practices with the teaching of their standards.

She said twice during her interview that coaching support with the *Read to Be Ready* practices had truly made a difference in her commitment to using them.

**SQ3: What are the perceived costs relative to time, cognitive demands, and physical demands of implementing the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices?** Participants revealed during the interviews that pressures of time, planning, and state standardized testing were the factors they perceived as potential costs to implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices. Felicia stated that time was her “biggest challenge.” “If we had more time, we could implement more – especially in the reading group.” She mentioned that time was the biggest factor that determined whether or not she could really delve into something like she wanted to, especially when it came to needing to go deeper “with one particular skill or one particular book.”

Daphne said her biggest struggle transitioning from using the practices at summer camp to using them in her classroom was time. “At camp, we had time to pop outside and do something, explore something related to the text.” She felt like due to the many standards she needed to cover, she did not have the time to go as in depth with topics as the practices could actually allow her to.

Isabel called time her “ultimate enemy.” She explained that 60 minutes of face time was not nearly enough time to do what she needed to do. “I get 60 minutes of face time, most of the time. But in actuality, that’s not the way it goes. Not with pull-outs, testing, interruptions of all kinds.” She was very adamant that protecting teachers’ face time with students was necessary to ensure they are able to “seamlessly incorporate” all the reading and writing standards they were being asked to teach.

Time also relates to the other commonly mentioned struggle, which was planning lessons involving the use of the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices. “It’s not something you can just whip out of a curriculum book and have already there for you. It definitely takes time to plan each lesson...they’re intense lessons.” Katie repeatedly said that she did not have the time it took to properly plan her literacy lessons. She did say that her administrator was taking extra steps this school year to protect teacher planning time after listening to feedback from teachers. “Here, this year, they have really tried to make sure that our planning has been kept safe-guarded, but we still have data meetings and other things that come up, like parent meetings.”

June agreed that implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices required access to decent planning time. “The *Read to Be Ready* thing is great, but you do have to spend a lot of time to plan that way. It takes time to gather all the resources for the lessons.” She said that

teachers who were trying to implement these practices without the help of other colleagues would have a much harder time with planning.

If you are working on your own, and not with a team, it takes so much more of your time. And that makes it tempting to just try to get done the pressing things on your list and not plan with great intention.

The most overwhelming perceived cost of implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices, that was mentioned by all 12 participants, was the demand and pressure teachers felt from state standardized testing given at the end of each school year. It seemed counterintuitive that the participants would not want to implement evidence-based literacy practices, which could only help improve testing scores, but a common theme that emerged was the pressure of “covering standards” made it hard to go deeper with their instruction. Heather said that sometimes being in the classroom was more about “figuring out how to survive and do what the state wants us to do.” She talked at length about her struggles with implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices, like adding independent reading time and reading conferences, along with the internal battle she had over asking herself, “what ELA standard does this actually go with?” Heather said that implementing the strategies at camp “was a breeze” because there was not a “set curriculum we had to follow; however, the decisions concerning classroom implementation were not that easy.” She said ultimately, “the end of the year tests really freak people out.”

In her interview, Lila said that she believed disparity in implementation process among teachers may stem from the “workload that’s put on teachers.” Specifically, she pointed to the pressures of testing for which teachers are made to feel responsible. She said that deciding to implement the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices was “a huge commitment” and with “all

the testing and data that teachers have to gather, and as they test our kids more and more, that leaves less time for teachers to teach.” Lila said that was one of the big challenges she had to learn to overcome and see how the instructional practices “do not compete with testing” but actually help improve her students’ scoring.

**SQ4: What are the perceived benefits of implementing the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices?** The perceived benefits of implementing the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices are what appeared to be the motivators that caused participants to continue implementation, even when the challenges or perceived costs appeared to be high. There were four benefits that emerged from the data and were confirmed across the three subunit schools: reignited teacher joy for literacy instruction, noticeable improvement in student engagement, noticeable improvement in students’ literacy skills, and an increased level of student motivation and confidence as readers.

Interviews and observing the teachers in their classroom environment helped reveal a very obvious passion for teaching foundational literacy skills. Several of the teachers admitted this passion had been renewed after spending their summer teaching at a *Read to Be Ready* summer camp. They also mentioned that this renewed passion is what helped them become determined to implement the practices they learned at training into their own classrooms. Heather said, “I got excited about watching other people be passionate about teaching reading. And I liked it.” She said that passion was “contagious,” and it “created a culture of joy” that she still liked to think about. Heather pointed out that working at camp allowed her to work directly in a room full of other teachers, which she did not get to do on a regular basis. But she credited this teamwork as a factor in her renewed joy for teaching literature.

Ella also chatted excitedly about a reignited passion for teaching literacy. For several years in her career, she had been assigned to teach other subjects besides language arts, and she said she “felt a pull” in her heart to go back to teaching children’s literature after attending the *Read to Be Ready* training a few months before summer camp started. “And, that has directly impacted my classroom because I get to bring back my love of teaching children’s literature” Ella said it made her “very motivated” to come back to school and begin implementing the strategies she learned.

Participants were also consistent about reporting a noticeable increase in student engagement when they were using the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in class. Isabel said she got “true buy-in” after reading her students’ written responses to a mentor text they had read concerning ocean animals. She explained that she had built a text set around oceans and had been immersing her students in various texts that scaffolded their background knowledge on the topic. “They were locked in, and their questions were insatiable. All of a sudden, I noticed reading and writing were no longer a burden for them.” She credited her implementation of interactive read alouds as “making reading no longer a chore for students.”

Bianca said her argument for convincing other teachers to try implementing the instructional practices in their classrooms was simply that, “the kids love it.” In her interview, she noted that for the first time in a long time, she saw students “enjoying what they were reading.” Bianca talked at length about how her and her colleagues were amazed at summer camp how much they were able to convince students to read independently about topics, when the students they were serving were struggling readers “who were way behind in their reading skills.” She said seeing that true engagement from students, in spite of their struggles, is what encouraged her to “step out of [her] comfort zone.”

All 12 of the teachers who participated in this study felt that the improved engagement they noticed from students also helped lead to actual improvement in their literacy skills. The state had quantitative data from across the summer camps that supported there was overall improvement in students' fluency and comprehension skills from the beginning of summer camp until the end. Indeed, the participants across sub-unit schools in my study had before and after benchmark data from their camp site that showed the same improvement.

Grey said that learning more about literacy instructional practices helped her understand "the children's deficits" and "put together a plan for helping them progress and keep learning." She went on to say that what she got excited about was that that kind of instruction did not have to end when camp did. "I got really happy when I saw the results from camp and realized that was not the end of student learning. I had a chance to turn around and put what I learned into practice in the real world." She stated that she felt like creating better readers would improve students' all around academic performance in the long run.

I feel like if you can get them excited about reading, it's going to spread out to all parts of school – math and all. Because if you can read well, you can do math well, and you can do other things in school across all domains.

Courtney talked excitedly in her interview about the improvement in student vocabulary and student ability to recall details from texts. She said that she believed her students had shown growth in their reading skills because of her "improved instruction that came with the *Read to Be Ready* training." Courtney had participated in several of the *Read to Be Ready* trainings that were hosted across the state of Tennessee, which she openly credited as helping her better help her students. "Becoming aware of the uses and benefits that we have with the *Read to Be Ready*

training and understanding how to use it in my classroom has been the biggest factor in raising my students' literacy levels.”

Lastly, participants were excited about the increased levels of motivation and confidence they saw from their student readers. They felt this was a huge benefit of implementing the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in their own classrooms, and it directly affected their decisions to continue implementing them, despite the perceived costs. June said, “A lot of these practices foster a love of reading and help teachers capture kids' hearts toward reading.” She talked specifically about an assessment she gave her students at the beginning of the school year that measured how students felt about reading. Her students' scores reflected “a low value for reading and a negative view about their reading abilities.” June felt that her “deep commitment” to continually using the instructional practices like interactive read aloud, shared reading, small group reading, and independent reading with reading conferences “helped with retention and building connections.” When she gave that same assessment to students at the end of her first year of teaching with those practices, the data showed a “huge increase in students' motivation to read and confidence in their ability to do it well.”

Lila said her favorite thing to hear from students who used to struggle with reading was, “I am a reader. I am a good reader. I can do something that maybe I didn't think I could.” Actually hearing that kind of positive feedback from students encouraged Lila to continue implementing the practices, even when it did not always feel conducive to do so. “I think that implementing these practices is good for the kids. Not just in teaching them the skills that they need, but it's good to make them more excited and invested in reading.”

## Summary

Participants in this study explained the experiences they had when implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices. While each participant shared various thoughts and experiences, some common themes emerged. As participants talked about their work in implementing these practices, supports that were necessary to helping them get better about implementation were funding, getting access to high-quality resources, and being provided deeper training on the practices.

Analyzing data from across the three sub-units in this case study indicated that there appeared to be school-specific environmental factors that influenced teachers' choices regarding the implementation of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices. Participants with more active administrative support were more likely to feel compelled to keep using them. The demographics of the school was a common motivator that helped teachers commit to trying out the practices. In the schools where participants had colleagues with positive, collaborative attitudes, there seemed to be more success with using the instructional practices. The master schedule was mentioned as a factor at the school-level that could influence implementation decisions because of how time for instruction was allotted. School-level coaching and being able to have a person on site dedicated to promoting the use of the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices also helped participants regarding their implementation decisions.

Potential costs and benefits of implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices were named by participants. The greatest implementation costs appeared to be time, planning, and pressures of state standardized testing. The greatest benefits to implementation were named as reignited teacher joy when doing literacy instruction, a noticeable improvement in student

engagement during lessons, a noticeable improvement in students' literacy skills, and a renewed sense of motivation and confidence from student readers.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

### Overview

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences 12 elementary teachers from southeast TN had when implementing instructional practices learned from trainings that came out of a TN state-wide initiative known as *Read to Be Ready*. The overarching question and four subquestions relating to these teacher experiences were answered based on data collected from classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Findings from this study can contribute to an understanding of how top-down education initiatives are transferred to daily classroom practices.

In this chapter, a summary of the findings is included. The implications of these findings are explained. The relevance of these findings to the literature and theoretical framework outlined in Chapter Two is clarified. Empirical and theoretical implications of the findings are described. Delimitations and limitations of this study are outlined, and recommendations for future research are provided.

### Summary of Findings

This study was guided by one central question and four subquestions. The central question was, “What are the experiences teachers have when implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in their general classroom settings?” All of the participants in this study demonstrated a willingness to implement the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices as indicated by their interview answers, lesson plans, and the practices witnessed during the researcher’s two visits to their classrooms. In general, there were certain confines that limited their ability to implement the instructional practices with fidelity, and these were confines that were out of their direct control. Some of the participants reported feeling conflicted about

implementing the instructional practices when they were not fully confident that their district wanted them to be concentrating on that. Other district initiatives, like Lucy Calkins writing and monthly after school PD trainings seemed to confuse participants about where to direct their efforts.

However, all 12 participants reported feeling happier and more motivated about their reading instruction than they had in many years. Some even reported a reignited passion for literacy instruction and a new energy for helping students become good readers. The word “freedom” came up in personal interviews 18 times. Most participants felt like the *Read to Be Ready* training gave them the permission, or the freedom, they had been looking for to try some new instructional practices, after feeling somewhat unsuccessful using their current practices. Even those who were already implementing the practices of interactive read aloud, shared reading, small group reading, and independent reading with reading conferences reported a renewed understanding of the *why* behind these practices, which motivated them to continue using them with fidelity.

Subquestion one asked, “What are the supports teachers identify as necessary in the implementation process?” Teachers who participated in this study felt like there should be more deliberate training on the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices. Though the state offered regional coaching, this district did not directly partake in any of those trainings. Continued training on the practices was cited as a big support that teachers needed. Participants also brought up the need for administrative and district-level support, which they felt was only provided at surface level. Participants in this study recommended that they would have “better focus” on where to direct their instructional efforts if their district could “pick a task and go that

way.” At least five participants reported feeling like they received conflicting messages from their district about what approaches they should be taking in the classroom to improve literacy.

Subquestion two asked, “What school specific environmental factors influence teachers’ choice regarding the implementation of *Read to Be Ready* practices?” There were five environmental factors that were school-specific that were observed during this study to possibly influence teachers’ choice regarding their implementation. Administrator awareness and understanding of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices was the most cited factor. Among the three schools in this study, Cherry St. Elementary, where participants reported a great school environment, admitted they had an administrator who was completely unfamiliar with the practices and had no conversations with their principals regarding their work with them.

Attitudes of colleagues within the building also seemed to affect teachers’ implementation experiences. At Cherry St. Elementary, all four participants talked about the positive attitudes of the colleagues in their building and their willingness to support each other. This positive, social environment seemed to have a positive impact on implementation. Katie, from Thomas St. Elementary, reported that her school environment was not so conducive to implementation of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices, when it came to support from colleagues. She told a story about how it was hard for her school to even find teachers willing to volunteer for teaching summer camp and attending the training.

Well, the other schools in our district are very supportive of *Read to Be Ready*. They fill their roles for the camp very quickly. Our school, sadly, is not that way, and it’s really disheartening to hear how many teachers say they need their summer break and time away from kids.

The master schedule set-up of individual schools and whether or not grade levels were

self-contained or departmentalized also influenced implementation decisions. Participants working within self-contained classrooms reported less freedom with scheduling than did the participants who were departmentalized. Teachers who worked in the self-contained classrooms talked about the pressures they felt to address other subjects' standards. None of the three schools in this study had identical set ups when it came to master scheduling or grade levels being either self-contained or departmentalized.

Subquestion three was, "What are the perceived costs of implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices?" The four repeatedly mentioned costs were: time, planning, funding, and access to resources. Every participant stated that they felt there was not enough time in the day to cover the reading standards the way they wished they could. They also reported feeling tremendous pressure to cover every reading standard because of standardized testing and admitted there was not enough time in a school year to teach these standards as thoroughly as needed.

In order to effectively implement *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices, teachers said it required much planning time to create the lessons and build the text sets they needed to do things right. Three participants felt like their planning time was not protected within their school due to all the extra meetings they were required to attend during that allotted time in their schedule. These three participants were from the same school.

Funding was a major perceived cost mentioned by almost every participant. Teachers spoke of the limited budget they received from the school to be able to purchase high-quality books for students to use in the personal classroom library or to use for building text sets when covering state standards. Also, a big part of *Read to Be Ready* instruction involves scaffolding students' background knowledge and creating experiences that connect texts to the real-world

and make text topics relevant for students. Participants noted that funding for materials for extension activities or funding for taking small field trips outside of the classroom would help them to better meet these goals.

Related to funding, participants talked about their lack of access to high-quality resources. This was also noted in the field notes from the classroom observations, as it was evident that none of the participants were using the same materials. The books in teachers' classroom libraries were noted to be out of date, well-worn, and culturally out of touch. In fact, in one classroom observation, a participant was using a *National Geographic* magazine to review nonfiction text structure, and this magazine was over six years old. The value of being able to access needed resources could not be overstated by participants in this study.

Lastly, subquestion four addressed the benefits of implementation. It asked, "What are the perceived benefits of implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices?" There were four benefits that emerged consistently from the data: reignited passion for literacy instruction, noticeable improvement in students' literacy skills, noticeable increase in student engagement in ELA lessons, and noticeable increase in students' motivation and confidence towards reading. Teachers reported that these benefits were enough to compel them to continue implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices, even when the perceived costs were quite high.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this section is to discuss the findings of the study in relation to the theoretical and empirical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. It will explain how this study contributes to the field and extends the theory of Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory, which informs this research. The final section will detail how this study confirms and extends

previous research on early childhood literacy, early literacy instruction, and the transferability of teacher professional development.

### **Theoretical Literature**

Bandura's (1986) Social Cognitive Theory considers the way that individuals acquire and maintain behavior, while also considering the social and environmental contexts in which that behavior is performed. Bandura (1986) suggested that people's past experiences, their expectations, and positive or negative reinforcements in their environment work together and shape whether people will or will not engage in particular behaviors. These same factors also influence the reasons why people will or will not engage in those behaviors.

This study was guided by Bandura's (1986) SCT, which caused the researcher to look specifically at participants' *Read to Be Ready* implementation behaviors and experiences to see how they were possibly related to each participant's social and environmental factors. The researcher also wanted to see how positive or negative reinforcements in participants' social and environmental contexts had any effect on their implementation behaviors. This is the reason why three different elementary schools within the district being studied were chosen, instead of focusing on only one school. The rationale was to see if different social and environmental interactions resulted in noticeably different implementation behaviors.

There appeared to be a big social factor that affected participants' implementation experiences. Participants who worked in highly social schools, where there was a collaborative atmosphere, an expectation of teacher sharing, and where teachers were recognized for innovation or improvement expressed the greatest interest and commitment to continued implementation. Of the three embedded sub-unit schools, only one of the schools, Cherry St. Elementary, was determined to have this type of social environment. All four of the participants

from this school talked about the social support they had within the building. Daphne talked about heightened levels of “collaboration with colleagues.” Grey discussed “co-teaching and working off each other’s strengths.” Aaron talked about “a spirit of excitement” within his school, and June stated, “Talking about what is working in our classrooms and sharing the positive things together and incorporating everyone’s ideas, I think, is going to have a positive effect on the students.” Their statements supported the tenant of SCT that social interactions are important for influencing human behavior.

This study also supported another major tenant of SCT, which is that reinforcements, whether positive or negative, do influence human behavior. Reinforcements, according to Bandura (1986), are internal or external responses to a person’s behavior that affect whether or not a person is likely to continue or discontinue that certain behavior. The interview questions that addressed subquestions three and four were designed to address this component of SCT. Participants were asked to think about what they perceived in their environments to be possible costs (negative reinforcements) or benefits (positive reinforcements) to implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in their own classrooms. Though all 12 participants were unable to implement the practices with the fidelity they desired to do so, they all 12 answered that the perceived benefits of doing the work outweighed the perceived costs they noted in interviews. The engagement they seemed to get from students and the noticeable improvement in students’ literacy skills were enough of a positive reinforcement to help participants continue implementation in spite of the costs. In particular, participants were highly motivated by the increase in student motivation and confidence towards reading.

## Empirical Literature

The results of this study corroborate previous research that suggested transforming schools through the implementation of large-scale initiatives required school principals to help support and develop their staff and set clear expectations about what they would like to see (Gawlik, 2015; McDonald, 2014; Schechter & Shaked, 2017; Young & Lewis, 2015).

Participants in this study described their implementation experiences of the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices as lacking in administrative support. While some of the participants agreed that their principal would be willing to help, none of them were receiving strong, direct support. Specifically, participants wanted to make sure their principals understood the practices they were implementing because of observation scores being tied to a level of effectiveness. Participants voiced that they were unsure their principals fully understood the *Read to Be Ready* initiative and what exactly it was asking from teachers. This finding was in line with the literature that suggested administrators themselves need resources like time, information, and training on initiatives in order to become a better support system for their teachers and become the instructional leader teachers are often looking for (Derrington, 2011; Gratz, 2009; Malen, 2015).

In addition, participants noted that their principals have the most control over environmental factors like master schedules, budgets, and planning time, which affect their ability to fully implement new practices with fidelity. This reasoning is in line with the research which explained that the effectiveness of external policies, similar to the *Read to Be Ready* initiative, do not depend on how well a principal tries to implement them (Elmore, 2006; Kaniuka, 2012), but on “how they respond to the demands the policy puts in place in their environment” (Schechter & Shaked, 2017, p. 243).

The findings from this study also supported prior research that suggested students in poverty need more reading support than do their peers not living in poverty (Goldstein et al., 2017; Hayes, 2017; Strauss, 2016; Wallace, 2016). The demographics of the students who attended these three schools was brought up as a major issue in overcoming reading obstacles and was a big factor in motivating teachers to use the evidence-based *Read to Be Ready* literacy instructional practices. The majority of participants in this study worked with students from largely economically disadvantaged homes or from minority background populations. The teachers continued to express a need for access to better funding and higher-quality resources. Participants particularly brought up the need for more funding for classroom libraries and for opportunities to fund field trips that would take students outside the classroom walls, exposing them to new ideas and experiences. This exposure is important for building background knowledge, expanding vocabulary, and helping students connect texts to the real world – all of which are cited as skill deficits particular to students growing up in poverty (Cervetti, Wright, & Hwang, 2016; Kaefer, 2018; Lupo et al., 2018).

Lastly, this study adds to the literature concerning the ongoing debate over phonics or whole language instruction in elementary grades instruction. The *Read to Be Ready* approach would be considered a balanced approach to teaching literacy, only too often schools say they are using the balanced approach to disguise the fact that they have no real plan for literacy instruction. The *Read to Be Ready* approach is a true balanced approach, that requires teachers to do

explicit teaching and guided practice aimed at developing knowledge of words (including phonemic awareness, phonics, letter names, spelling, morphology, vocabulary); oral reading fluency; reading comprehension; and writing. And, for English learners (and

perhaps poverty kids too) – explicit oral language teaching. (Shanahan, 2019, para. 14)

This type of explicit teaching was evidenced by the way these participants had organized their literacy blocks and by the lesson plans they submitted. While there were teacher-led explanations and guided reading discussions, the students were being asked to do the majority of the reading throughout these activities. Also, the teachers planned time for explicit phonics instruction in their reading lessons, it is just that this phonics instruction was in connection to the text they were reading in class and not done in isolation through the use of worksheets or card sorting. One of the strongest themes that emerged from the data was evidence of improved student literacy skills, increased student engagement, and increased student motivation and confidence towards reading. This theme supported previous research that recommended the blended approach to early literacy may improve student gains in reading skills, rather than using only a phonics or only a whole language approach (Damianou, 2016; Shanahan, 2019; Synder & Golightly, 2017).

### **Implications**

The purpose of this section is to address the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study. In the following subsections, I will explain how this study has implications related to Albert Bandura's (1986) well-known Social Cognitive Theory. I will also explore the empirical implications and how this study confirms previous research on early literacy instructional practice and extends previous research on teacher professional development and its transferability to the actual classroom. Practical implications related to teachers, instructional coaches, administrators, state education leaders, and policy-makers are discussed.

## Theoretical Implications

A main tenant of Bandura's (1986) SCT is that when people observe a model performing a behavior and see the consequences of that behavior, they remember that model and use it to guide future behavior. Ultimately, their behavior becomes influenced by social and environmental factors as well. The response people receive after performing a behavior is an influencer on their decision to perform it again or not. Along with that, aspects of people's environment influence whether or not they are able to successfully complete a behavior (Bandura, 1986).

Using SCT as a framework for understanding the implementation behavior of teachers trying to use *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in their classroom, helps affirm the data collected during this study. Teachers who participated in this study first used the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices at a summer literacy camp, where they worked with small groups of students on growing early literacy skills. Ten of the 12 participants said that it was their work at summer camp that gave them motivation to re-think literacy instruction from the way they were doing it. That model of summer camp was a strong influencer on determining implementation behaviors because it gave teachers a guide for how they could change their typical literacy instruction based on what they had seen and experienced at summer camp.

Additionally, social and environmental factors were major factors that affected implementation behaviors of teachers. Participants who worked with colleagues with positive attitudes and who were willing to collaborate and try new things, felt deeper support and encouragement for continuing implementation. Environmental factors, like schedules and school demographics also affected implementation choices made by participants. Eight of the 12 participants suggested that environmental confines made it difficult to implement *Read to Be*

*Ready* instructional practices in their own classrooms with the fidelity and ease that they were able to do so at the summer literacy camp.

Setting up positive school environments, where trying out new instructional practices was encouraged, and where core academics, rather than lunch and specials dominate the master scheduling process, could be conducive to helping teachers transfer new learning from one social model to the next. Principals may want to consider making themselves available during teachers' planning times to talk to them about the instructional practices they are using in the classroom and how those practices directly relate to any evaluation rubrics. Also, creating time for teachers to collaborate and talk about the instructional practices they are using could be beneficial. Primary grades reading teachers particularly need a space within the school where they can meet together to look at their reading standards and have practical conversations about deconstructing the standards and using practices and tasks that ask students to work at the depth and rigor intended by the reading standards. Principals can encourage this collaborating and sharing of knowledge and other resources. In particular, administrators could work with teachers on a plan for how they can share high-quality books amongst grade levels and build text sets off the grade level's whole collection of books, rather than off of individual's book collections. Instructional coaches in schools could set up opportunities for teachers to observe other teachers within the school who are trying out new practices, in order to get a hands-on model of how it might look. Principals can help with these co-observations by putting aside money in the school budget for substitutes to work in the classrooms where teachers have been pulled out to watch another teacher.

Instead of starting the creation of a master schedule by marking off time for lunch and specials first and then giving academic classes the leftover time, school leadership teams could

try creating longer literacy blocks and then working around those blocks with lunch and specials. For example, many school districts only offer the minimal weekly planning time to teachers. Alternative scheduling may be used to provide teachers with extra planning time for collaborating with their peers.

### **Empirical Implications**

A large part of educational mandates in Tennessee, in the last ten years, have come from top-down approaches, which may have created a sense of apathy towards attempting change. These top-down approaches are not usually known for bringing long-term success since resistance and trust issues become factors to receptiveness. “Teachers and students generally feel that change is done to them, rather than something they participate in” (Baron, 2017, para. 1).

The approach to implementing these state-wide changes in teaching practices had to be practical and strategic. State leaders knew that without teacher buy-in, *Read to Be Ready* would be just another initiative that would lose steam over time. To get this type of understanding for teachers, there was going to have to be high-quality training that was accessible to early grades teachers.

TDOE (2017b) observations revealed that teachers had difficulty understanding how to thoughtfully sequence questions and create tasks that provided students the opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency. Also, teacher surveys suggested that there was a lack of understanding on how to align the brand new grade-level standards with the more rigorous tasks. Basically, teachers understood there was a disconnect between their current practices and what was actually required but seemed unsure how to begin shifting their instruction to close the gaps.

To help provide great training for teachers, *Read to Be Ready* program leaders worked to create a network of coaches. These coaches received additional training on comprehensive literacy instruction. The goal was to have research-based practices make their way back to the classroom, and the way to accomplish that was to deploy coaches across the state who could re-deliver the training in their buildings (TDOE, 2017b).

The *Read to Be Ready* Coaching Network successfully built strategic partnerships that allowed for focused conversations and professional development in the specific area of K-3 literacy. District literacy coaches met several times throughout subsequent school years to receive training on reading instruction. These coaches also built a collaborative network that helped them reflect on current practices and have structured dialogue about how to make lasting, positive changes in reading classrooms.

Each *Read to Be Ready* Coaching Network session provided participants with specific strategies that would help them effectively lead professional development in their own districts. The sessions were always about different areas of instruction such as accessing complex texts through interactive read alouds or best practices for leading guided reading. With over 200 district coaches involved in the network, this opportunity for high-quality coach training led directly back to Tennessee classrooms as teachers were then deliberately trained on the latest topics. The ongoing support provided by the coaching network has helped sustain the momentum and excitement for building better reading classrooms across grades K-3.

However, teachers in this study did not have direct access to a coach from the Coaching Network, since the district being studied did not participate in it. Also, their district did not focus on *Read to Be Ready* as a district-wide literacy initiative, outside of hosting the summer camps. Understanding that there has not been a large administrative or district follow-through on the

intentional use of these literacy practices in elementary classrooms across this district, may indicate why classroom observation data showed large disparities between the parts of the practices that are being used in participants' classrooms. Participants also voiced concern about the other initiatives being put into place by the district, specifically Professional Learning Communities and the Lucy Calkins Writer's Workshop model. With multiple initiatives being pushed all 12 participants stated that they felt torn about where to invest their time and focus. This notion of teachers feeling torn between initiatives is in alignment with the literature that suggested that schools typically are unable to maintain complex initiatives due to concurrent reforms they are also trying to manage that take up teachers' "time, energy, and attention" (Malen et al., 2015, p. 135).

Based on these implications, districts may want to consider using data-driven evidence to help them narrow down on the amount of initiatives they are trying to implement. There is a great deal of quantitative and qualitative evidence to show that *Read to Be Ready* is a successful literacy program, most significantly, one that has evidence of helping an at-risk population. Teachers who are implementing these instructional practices may make a case to their district that *Read to Be Ready* is an instructional approach that they believe in, enjoying using, and which has provided concrete results in student reading growth. *Read to Be Ready* is at least, one initiative that, in this district, had the advantage of starting at the teacher-level which created more organic buy-in and a professional excitement for implementing their new learning.

### **Practical Implications**

The 12 teachers who participated in this embedded case study openly shared their feelings and perceptions regarding their various experiences with *Read to Be Ready* training, summer camp, and implementation of the instructional practices. Elementary grades teachers

who are interested in the use of these instructional practices may benefit from hearing the description of these experiences. Even though there are anecdotal stories and quantitative research studies available to support the use of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices at summer camp, this study in particular details the challenges and barriers classroom teachers may face when trying to implement them in their own classrooms. It makes teachers aware that it is not just their instruction they will have to consider, but also how to integrate the new practices in consideration of their time for planning, access to high-quality resources, classroom budgets, school-wide master scheduling, and ability to create hands-on, experiential learning for students.

In addition, any elementary grades teachers who are having difficulty helping struggling readers or who wish to improve their literacy instruction can benefit from the experiences these teachers have shared and the results of this study. This study explores innovative ways to teach reading to underperforming students with data to support student improvement. In particular, the participants in this study used the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in classroom environments that had large populations of students who came to the classroom from socioeconomically disadvantaged or minority backgrounds, and who had gaps in reading proficiency due to these backgrounds. The twelve participants in this study all reported noticeable improvement in students' literacy skills and motivation and confidence towards reading.

Administrators who are hoping to improve fidelity to school improvement planning that includes a focus on improving students' literacy skills would benefit from the results of this study. They need to understand that some of these instructional practices may look different from what teachers have been doing historically and be encouraged to ask any teachers who are using the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices how they can support the further use of these

practices through professional development or coaching opportunities. It may be useful for administrators who have teachers implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices sit down and have a focus group to determine both their needs and successes.

Teachers also wish for principals to invest themselves in the knowledge of any new practices they (or the state) are asking teachers to use so that they know what to look for when visiting the classroom and when performing evaluations. The participants in this study indicated an unease with being exactly sure that their principals knew the depth of rigor involved in using these practices and how they fit within the TEAM evaluation rubric. If administrators had a good understanding of these instructional practices and why teachers were using them, it could help teachers' confidence with continued implementation of the practices.

Teachers may want to sit with their administrators and show them a side by side comparison of lesson plans, one with *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices, and one without. Teachers will want to explain to principals exactly which practices they are using and detail exactly how that will look in the classroom setting. In particular, the components of interactive read aloud where teachers are having to ask certain questions to build background knowledge or scaffold learning to support readers before, during, or after the read. Also, teachers may want to explain the need for hands on experiences to be included in the lesson that relate to text topics but may not seem like they cover a reading standard, so that principals understand why an activity, like an experiment, might take place during a reading lesson. Teachers must intentionally help their administrators understand what is different about *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices and blatantly share that enthusiasm about this type of instruction.

It is recommended that school and district leaders take the time to informally visit classrooms that have teachers implementing *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices. An

informal walk-through type visit will alleviate the fear of receiving a score or evaluation note tied to the lesson. Teachers can take this opportunity to explain to these leaders what their most important needs are regarding the implementation of these practices but also show off the noticeable improvement in student reading abilities and confidence in reading to support their enthusiasm for this type of instruction. This would be a good time for school and district leaders to take note of what kind of reading resources teachers are actually using to teach foundational literacy.

Along with this, school and district leaders should make every effort to visit the schools that are hosting *Read to Be Ready* summer literacy camps. These visits will help them understand the different dynamic between the summer camp environment and the general school environment and may help explain why the structure of a regular school day makes it so difficult for teachers to implement the kinds of instructional practices they did at summer camp. While camp directors are required to submit before and after data to the state regarding summer camp results, administrators and district leaders should be asking their school-site directors for this same information. Summer camp directors should create a data guide to show the real results they are seeing for students regarding reading skills gains and improved confidence and motivation in reading. Having this type of data in-hand, helps administrators understand the importance of supporting implementation and may help them narrow down on the many literacy initiatives they are asking teachers to be a part of.

Administrators may also look at how funding for classroom libraries could become a priority in the budget. There may need to be a conversation with early grades reading teachers and instructional coaches to see how a realignment of funds may support their need for access to high-quality books and text sets. Also, funding and time for field trips may need to be

reconsidered. Participants in this study reported that field trips that allowed students to build their background knowledge about text topics became a critical part of their instruction and student learning. Administrators may want to re-evaluate their criteria for classroom field trips. Overall, it is imperative for administrators to know that teachers rely deeply on support from their principals to implement new practices

State education leaders are notorious for promoting programs or initiatives that hit districts in a top-down fashion. With pressures for teacher accountability not going away, state education leaders could consider giving schools who are willing to implement new initiatives with fidelity a hold harmless year or waiver from accountability to see what results look like when pressures to perform for a test are taken away. State education leaders may also need to be aware that teachers desire more support in the form of research and training about evidence-based practices. Due to the confines of the system, it may be up to these state leaders to be creative about the way they help teachers receive coaching on practices and continue to support their efforts of implementation.

Policy makers who are pushing for a more literate society and demanding improved student performance in reading should host a town hall meeting with teachers who are trying initiatives, such as *Read to Be Ready*, to get an idea of what the real challenges to implementation are. Teachers in this study spoke sadly about the major gaps in reading their students in poverty bring to the classroom. Understanding how poverty affects student reading ability and the demand for resources teachers need to reach these struggling readers should be of key notice to policy makers. In addition, the literature review in this study found that illiteracy ultimately affects the health of citizens, as they are unable to read accurately and make informed decisions about their health or the health of their children. Policy makers could champion a

cause that unites pediatric care offices with local schools, asking pediatric doctors to teach parents the importance of including early literacy activity in the home and to provide parents with the tools to guide them on how to teach developmental reading skills to their children. The findings from this study suggest that schools who service students with a majority of economically disadvantaged students may benefit from increased funding and access to higher-quality resources.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

One delimitation of this study was choosing an embedded case study design over other qualitative designs in order to look at *Read to Be Ready* implementation experiences within this single school district. This design gave the researcher the ability to perform a cross-unit analysis of the embedded sub-units to determine if environmental and social factors made a difference in implementation behaviors, especially since the three embedded elementary schools each had unique settings. Another delimitation was choosing this particular school district in Tennessee for this study because it was known for receiving *Read to Be Ready* summer camp grant funds at least two school years in a row. When designing this study, it was necessary to involve participants who had taken a part in teaching at summer camp at least once because all summer camp teachers were mandated to attend training on *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices before being allowed to teach at camp. Though other teachers in this district have had some general training on *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices, the training provided to summer camp teachers was much more rigorous and in-depth. A further delimitation was making the decision to collect data through the use of classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The documents which were analyzed were lesson plans that teachers provided. Originally, it was believed that seeing lesson plans against actual classroom

performance would provide interesting data on plans versus outcomes. While it did provide some revealing information, after performing this study, the researcher would have also liked to include a focus group study, which may have provided more enlightening data.

There are several limitations to this study. This study only applies to a single school district in the state of Tennessee and should not be generalized to other school districts, especially since this school district was not an official part of the *Read to Be Ready* Coaching Network. In order to increase generalizability, this research should be conducted at sites across Tennessee to include urban and rural schools and those that are part of the Coaching Network. In addition, many participants in this study knew me due to my role in the district, which could have affected answers given during the interviews. Most of the experiences described in this study were those of Caucasian females. The results of this study could look different, had I included a more diverse sampling population to include more minority populations and more male participants. Also, it should be noted that the people who were attracted to participate in this study were likely to be believers in the *Read to Be Ready* initiative. Since participants' classroom observations were announced but only lasted 30 minutes, this could have also skewed the data from the observational checklist, which recorded which practices teachers were using in their literacy blocks. Lastly, the use of a focus group study could have strengthened the data collected for this study.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The findings in this case study validated prior research on using evidence-based instructional practices to help build foundational literacy skills for students. It also extended prior research that discussed teacher professional development and its transferability to the general classroom. Recommendations for future research include doing this same study on a

state-wide level to include more diverse participants and schools from various areas across the state. Schools that are officially part of the *Read to Be Ready* Coaching Network, who have been receiving extensive support with the instructional practices should be included. It would be interesting to do a quantitative study on schools that are using *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices with fidelity in grades K-2 to see if there is a noticeable improvement in student's foundational literacy skills being assessed.

Another recommendation for future research is to look at this state-wide initiative from administrators' and district leaderships' point of view since this study suggested those were both areas that were lacking when it comes to implementation support. A qualitative study that asked principals about their training in early childhood literacy and understanding of the instructional practices could help explain how administrators can better support their teachers who are working to implement evidence-based practices in their schools. Also, a study that examined district leadership and its role in the implementation of top-down initiatives like *Read to Be Ready* would be beneficial to help determine how districts can be more supportive and clear about the expectations they have for teachers in their system.

A longitudinal study on the districts in Tennessee who continue to incorporate *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices over long periods of time should be conducted to determine how students' skills, motivation, and confidence look over time in comparison to those students' who have not had regular and continued exposure to these instructional practices.

### **Summary**

Tennessee state education leaders have been trying to address issues of low reading proficiency from early grades readers through an initiative called *Read to Be Ready*. With state-wide proficiency levels as low as 35%, *Read to Be Ready* was created to train primary grades

teachers on evidence-based literacy practices to incorporate in their classrooms (TDOE, 2016). The training was primarily meant to come through the support of a Coaching Network, but with *Read to Be Ready* funds being used to support summer literacy camps at various schools across the state, hundreds of teachers who taught at these camps received hands-on training with the practices.

These summer camps were fully funded by grant funds from the state. Their purpose was to address issues of summer slide with struggling readers and students from minority or economically disadvantaged backgrounds, whose proficiency rates on state standardized testing have been historically lower than those of middle- or upper- income, non-minority students.

The purpose of this study was to describe the implementation experiences of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices that 12 teachers from a district in southeast Tennessee had, after they had been trained on the practices and utilized them in one of the summer literacy camps. The findings from this study suggest that while literacy improvement has been both a state focus and a district focus, there have been conflicting messages to teachers about what appropriate early grades reading instruction should look like. If there was a way for states to streamline their expectations with district expectations, there is a possibility for improved teacher focus and student outcomes. In particular, the accountability structures in place to evaluate teacher effectiveness in Tennessee, put a large amount of pressure on teachers to “cover standards” rather than to teach at a level of depth and rigor required by the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices. In addition, all efforts should be made to have state and local training correspond, so that teachers are clear about which instructional practices are expected to be used.

Also, one big take-away from this study is that the environment of the summer camps was so vastly different from the environment of the general classrooms that it is much harder for

teachers to implement the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices with the freedom they did at summer camp. In fact, this is part of the problem related to the transferability of their professional development on the practices. To overcome the enormous gaps like lack of vocabulary exposure, lack of practice with reading, lack of exposure to rich conversation, and lack of real-world experiences that struggling readers often bring to the table, it almost requires a completely different set-up to address these issues. At summer camp, teachers had abundant funding to buy high-quality books to use in literacy instruction. They were also required to purchase books for students to take home and keep for their personal libraries. This led to reported increase in student reading outside of school and student pride in book ownership. Teachers also had extended windows of time at camp, without interruption, to implement these instructional practices with fidelity. For example, there was plenty of time to do at least 30 minutes of small group reading and allow students ample time for independent reading. Due to the funding for books, students also had multiple texts available to choose from for their independent reading sessions. Because of the low student-teacher ratio at the camps, teachers were also readily able to keep thorough notes on their assigned students' areas of deficit, interest in books, independent reading assignments, and notes from independent reading conferences. This level of thoroughness is much harder to maintain in a classroom with 20 or more students.

When they needed opportunities to extend student learning about a text's topic, camp teachers had the funding and time available to create field trips where students could explore ideas related to the text, outside of the school walls and gain new experiences that helped with accessing the ideas in the text. Additionally, the set-up for camp included the time needed and the funding for buying materials for extension activities where students could explore concepts from text and build a deeper understanding of the text. This allowed for more real-world

connections and helped to extend their learning. Participants in this study reported that providing these hands-on, exploratory activities was the area where their classroom practice most differed from their summer camp practice.

In conclusion, teachers from this study reported an overall positive experience with their implementation of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices. They noted a new level of excitement about literacy instruction and noticeable improvement regarding students' literacy growth, engagement, and motivation and confidence towards reading. Despite the restraints of time, money, resources, and consistent administrator and district support, teachers felt like using interactive read alouds, shared reading, small group reading, and independent reading with reading conferences was the right way to go in developing strong readers.

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## APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

# LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 31, 2018

Jessica D. Bigham

IRB Approval 3530.103118: Implementation of Read to Be Ready Instructional Practices: A Case Study

Dear Jessica D. Bigham,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

████████████████████ |

*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*

**The Graduate School**

*Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971*

## APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT

The Liberty University Institutional  
Review Board has approved  
this document for use from  
10/31/2018 to 10/30/2019  
Protocol # 3530.103118

### CONSENT FORM

Implementation of *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices: A case study  
Jessica D. Bigham  
Liberty University  
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study examining the *Read to Be Ready* implementation experiences of teachers. You were selected as a possible participant because you are an instructor at an elementary school that has received a *Read to Be Ready* Summer Camp Grant, and your school site runs a summer camp where at least four teachers have worked. In addition, your school utilizes the service of an instructional coach who has received *Read to Be Ready* training and who regularly coaches teachers from your school. Also, you have been identified as a possible participant because you taught at a summer camp for at least four weeks, you are employed as a K-5 teacher, and you work in the school district being studied. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Jessica D. Bigham, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to describe the implementation experiences that teachers have connected to the *Read to Be Ready* Tennessee state initiative and identify any supports that teachers may need to make this initiative easier to implement.

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

1. Agree to fill out a demographic questionnaire which will provide important demographic information. It should take less than ten minutes for this form to be completed.
2. Agree to be observed on two separate occasions for thirty minutes each time. Notes will be taken by the researcher, but nothing will be audio or video recorded.
3. Agree to be interviewed about your *Read to Be Ready* experiences. This interview will last approximately 1 hour, and all interviews will be audio recorded.
4. Agree to allow the researcher to examine one lesson plan. This should take about 30 minutes to locate and submit this document to the researcher.
5. Agree to take part in the transcription review process to help the researcher check for accuracy in her research. This would take an additional 30 minutes of your time.

**Risks:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**Benefits:** Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

This study may benefit teachers in the elementary field who are often asked to implement top-down initiatives and take part in state-funded programming. This study can provide information on how to make these experiences better and more transferable to the regular classroom setting.

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Protocol # 3530.103118

Benefits to society include improved professional development designs by state departments of education and identifying supports that teachers need to make implementation experiences more impactful.

**Compensation:** Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- To protect the privacy of all participants, pseudonyms will be assigned to all participants. School sites will be coded with pseudonyms to protect the identity of the school. All interviews will be conducted in a closed conference room, where there is no possibility of being overheard.
- Data will be stored on a password protected computer and may be used in future presentations. All notes and hard copies of transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher and professional transcriptionist will have access to these recordings.

**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 Liberty University or Cleveland City Schools. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Jessica D. Bigham. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at (423) 718-4786 or [jdbigham@liberty.edu](mailto:jdbigham@liberty.edu). You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Sarah Pannone at [sjpannone@liberty.edu](mailto:sjpannone@liberty.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.*

The Liberty University Institutional  
Review Board has approved  
this document for use from  
10/31/2018 to 10/30/2019  
Protocol # 3530.103118

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Signature of Investigator

Date

## APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHICS FORM

The following demographics information will only be used in the study as a means of describing the sample. Please mark each question accordingly.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**1. Gender (check one):**

Male \_\_\_\_\_ Female \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Ethnicity: (check one):**

African American \_\_\_\_\_

Caucasian \_\_\_\_\_

Hispanic/Latino \_\_\_\_\_

Native American \_\_\_\_\_

Pacific Islander \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Years of Teaching Experience (check one):**

1-3 years \_\_\_\_\_

4-9 years \_\_\_\_\_

10-20 years \_\_\_\_\_

20+ years \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Highest Professional Degree Earned (check one):**

Bachelor's \_\_\_\_\_

Master's \_\_\_\_\_

Ed.S. \_\_\_\_\_

Ed. D \_\_\_\_\_

5. Please list your professional certifications below.

---

---

6. Please fill in the blank with your current age. \_\_\_\_\_

7. List the current grade level(s) you teach. \_\_\_\_\_

8. Use the following scale to rate your commitment to using *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in your classroom. Circle your response.

1 – very low   2 – low   3 – medium   4 – high   5 – very high

9. Use the following scale to rate your frequency of use of the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices in your daily teaching routines. Circle your response.

1 – very low   2 – low   3 – medium   4 – high   5 – very high

10. Use the following scale to rate how much you value the *Read to Be Ready* instructional practices. Circle your response.

1 – strongly disvalue   2 – do not value   3 – neutral   4 – value   5 – strongly value

## APPENDIX D: OBSERVATIONS

Field notes will be collected using the following observation protocol form. Notes will be taken throughout both observation periods, for each participant, to document instances in which teachers are using or not using the Read to Be Ready literacy strategies.

| Observation Protocol           |                  |
|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Length of Activity: 30 minutes |                  |
| Descriptive Notes              | Reflective Notes |
|                                |                  |

### APPENDIX E: OBSERVATION CHECKLIST

| <i>Read to Be Ready</i> practices                                   | Observed during Observation 1 | Observed during Observation 2 |
|---|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Interactive Read Alouds</b>                                      |                               |                               |
| asks students to make inferences or judgments                       |                               |                               |
| asks students to summarize or retell important events               |                               |                               |
| chooses above grade-level text                                      |                               |                               |
| creates connections to other texts or to students' lives            |                               |                               |
| embeds vocabulary instruction                                       |                               |                               |
| emphasizes elements of the story                                    |                               |                               |
| integrates higher-order questioning                                 |                               |                               |
| models fluent reading   |                               |                               |
| plans for multiple reads of this text                               |                               |                               |
| previews vocabulary   |                               |                               |
| scaffolds background knowledge on the text's topic                  |                               |                               |
| uses think-alouds to model metacognition                            |                               |                               |
| <b>Shared Reading</b>   |                               |                               |
| allows opportunities for students to practice fluency or expression |                               |                               |
| assists students in learning where to look or focus attention       |                               |                               |
| brief picture walk before reading                                   |                               |                               |
| develops concepts about print and phonemic connections              |                               |                               |
| models appropriate inflection and tone                              |                               |                               |
| pauses for students to make predictions                             |                               |                               |
| students act as though they are reading                             |                               |                               |
| uses a Big Book for all students to see text                        |                               |                               |
| uses a text students may not be able to read on their own           |                               |                               |
| <b>Small Group Reading</b>  |                               |                               |
| direct instruction on elements of comprehension                     |                               |                               |
| direct instruction on elements of fluency                           |                               |                               |
| echo, choral, whisper, or lead reading of new book                  |                               |                               |
| includes a new book read  |                               |                               |
| includes tips on at least one reading strategy                      |                               |                               |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| nonfiction book structure is reviewed                                       |  |  |
| opportunities for students to retell or summarize                           |  |  |
| practice with sight words or vocabulary from text                           |  |  |
| re-read of a familiar text  |  |  |
| teacher listens and coaches as students read together                       |  |  |
| utilizes flexible grouping  |  |  |
| <b>Independent Reading/Conferences</b>                                      |  |  |
| classroom management procedures are in place to ensure quality reading time |  |  |
| individualized reading instruction provided; explicit strategies            |  |  |
| reading goals are set for individual students                               |  |  |
| room is set up for student access to multiple texts                         |  |  |
| students have at least 15 minutes of independent reading time               |  |  |
| students have choice about independent reading texts                        |  |  |
| students use journaling to write about their reading                        |  |  |
| teacher facilitates one-on-one instruction                                  |  |  |
| teacher takes notes and records important information from the conference   |  |  |
| teacher uses notes from past conferences to inform current instruction      |  |  |

## APPENDIX F: COPYRIGHT PERMISSION

Elizabeth Alves <Elizabeth.Alves@tn.gov>



### Reply

Yesterday, 10:48 PM

Jessica Bigham;

Becky Cox <Becky.Cox@tn.gov>

You forwarded this message on 2/14/2019 7:43 AM

Hi Jessica,

Thanks for reaching out to us regarding this request. I have confirmed with our legal department that you have permission to use the three graphics that you identified below with the citation. Good luck completing your dissertation! Would love to hear about your findings!

Elizabeth

**Elizabeth Alves, Ed.D.** | Interim Deputy Commissioner/Chief Academic Officer  
 Andrew Johnson Tower, 12th Floor  
 710 James Robertson Parkway, Nashville, TN 37243  
 Cell: (615) 712-1382  
[Elizabeth.Alves@tn.gov](mailto:Elizabeth.Alves@tn.gov)

### Reply

Mon 2/11, 11:03 AM

Elizabeth.Alves@tn.gov

Dr. Alves,

Good morning! My name is Jessica Bigham, and I work in the [REDACTED] district. I am contacting you because I would like to ask permission to reproduce three graphics found in a TDOE publication, that I placed in my dissertation. After defending my dissertation last week, my program at Liberty University requires me to submit it for publication in the Liberty University open-access institutional repository, the Scholars Crossing, and in the ProQuest Thesis and Dissertation subscription research database.

My dissertation was on the *Read to Be Ready* initiative. I am wanting in particular to use the graphics for skills-based and knowledge-based competencies found on page 8 of the *Teaching Literacy in Tennessee* guide and the elements of the literacy block graphic found on page 13 of the *Teaching Literacy in Tennessee* guide that was published by the TDOE.

If you are able to grant this permission, I will provide a citation of the work as follows:

Tennessee Department of Education. (2017). *Teaching literacy in Tennessee*. Retrieved from [https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/readready/documents/teaching-literacy-in-tn/teaching\\_literacy\\_in\\_tn\\_update\\_4\\_9\\_18.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/readready/documents/teaching-literacy-in-tn/teaching_literacy_in_tn_update_4_9_18.pdf)